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PREFACE

THIS BOOK is an attempt to describe what I believe to be certain of the functions of the imagination in daily life, particularly in the daily life of the English people. It has been written in the belief that the disregard of the nature and function of the imagination leaves a great force undisciplined and undeveloped in a critical period when it may well be a determining factor for the survival of civilisation itself. In this belief I suggest that imagination, the root of the poetic faculty, is not the prerogative or sole possession of the men of genius in art, religion, philosophy, or science, but that something akin to this quality exists, often suppressed or perverted, in most men. I have made no systematic examination of this question; to do so would require greater space, a longer time, and greater capacities than I can command. All that I have attempted are a few suggestions which might stimulate thought and inquiry in individual minds.

Among these suggestions are the three figures in Part II, which are offered, not, of course, as "characters" or individuals, but rather as specimens might be prepared for a laboratory demonstration, to present precisely those characteristics on which the demonstration turns. Just as the cases he later meets in the clinic never seem to provide the medical student with exactly that combination of symptoms he once studied in his text-books, so no "real" man provides us with a demonstration of behaviour that is at once sharply defined and free from irrelevance or contradiction. But even schematic figures may come, I hope, nearer to actuality than general observations and show at least a design for living, if not life. The designs that I have sketched may, I know, provoke disagreement, perhaps even irritation, but I challenge those readers who consider themselves warrantably provoked to attempt the same task themselves. I undertake to read with interest

and attention any alternative schemes that they will allow me the privilege of seeing.

I think it probable that as much as possible is already being done to draw out and encourage the growth of the imaginative habit in the course of school education in this country; those teachers who have an innate sense of its value have always directed their work in accordance with this principle and those who have not would undoubtedly do more harm than good if they tried to apply it artificially. But many grown men and women in whom the faculty has once been encouraged allow it to atrophy and a number more in whom it has been overlaid or thwarted submit to this condition instead of rebelling against it and attempting to revive the innate power. It is to them and to those who work with them that this book is addressed.

It is perhaps peculiarly a book for Englishmen. I believe that in the British races the poetic faculty exists, even if only potentially, in an exceptionally high degree. We could of course appeal for evidence to the testimony of history and our long, our almost unbroken, record of high poetic achievement; but most people who themselves belong to any one of these races, are familiar with the evidences of imaginative power in their fellow-men, especially in men reared and living in the country. It varies a little as between Irishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen, and Englishmen, but it is there in all of them. In our great towns and, above all, in the suburbs which are their by-products, it is often overlaid and maimed, but the further we go from urban districts the deeper, the more spontaneous, and the more indigenous it appears to be.

It is because of the psychological effects of big-town and suburban life, a new factor in our recent development providing a new kind of social problem, that I have been concerned to speak of the exercise of the imagination chiefly in terms of the surroundings created by mechanised civilisation. Evil though many of the results of this undoubtedly are, I cannot believe that the case is desperate

or that the people who spontaneously acclaimed the plays of Shakespeare three and a half centuries ago were fundamentally different from the heroic citizens of to-day, or that these last have forfeited in any irremediable degree a fundamental part of their heritage. Indeed, it is from the people themselves that I believe redemption will come, though this does not suggest that it is either just or humane to impose upon them any longer the task of making way unaided against the forces of poverty, hunger, exhaustion, overcrowding—all the conditions involved in living near the necessity line. The worst offenders in this matter of dishonouring and neglecting the poetic imagination inherent in the whole race, are most often those of the classes that have in their hands the imposing or executing of the tribal taboos. Since about the middle of the nineteenth century there has been growing up a curious convention which at best mistrusts and at worst despises the exercise of the imagination in everyday life and its manifestation in artistic and poetic expression. It was surely a curious cult which, because some men of action are a little incoherent in thought and expression, made clumsy inarticulateness the supreme test of manliness, resource, and breeding. When this convention reached the suburban novel and cinema it became laughable, and therefore innocuous, by crystallising out in the crude, familiar figure of the strong, silent man. But the same convention which, by checking precise expression of thought and feeling, inevitably choked the power to think and feel precisely, condemned also most other manifestations of imaginative, emotional, or intellectual experience, and so in turn the habit of exploring these regions of experience. The class which practised this most sedulously had, I think, great though unacknowledged influence (being high enough up the social scale to seem worthy of imitation, but not too high to have contact with the mass of the lower middle classes). The habit of checking the exercise of imagination and the expression

of its experience spread, therefore, through the large spiritual "depressed areas" of our suburbs and small towns till it infected nearly all except the classes high enough to have nothing to fear or low enough to have nothing to lose from adverse public opinion. It is unnecessary to point out that the contemporaries of Drake, Shakespeare, Elizabeth and Humphrey Davy would have found this convention as stimulating a theme for satire and contempt as any of the other absurdities they pilloried in their dramas and their social pamphlets. But it was a folly not likely to make much head among the contemporaries of Walter Raleigh; soldier, statesman, navigator, explorer, a poet whom one hesitates to class as minor and the writer of some of the noblest prose of even that great generation. It was left to the men of later centuries to treat imaginative vision as a trivial toy and the great imaginative artist as though he fell a little short of what was expected of a man. It is hardly surprising, then, that we have abused, neglected, and betrayed the poetic imagination innate in our race until we have appeared to others as to ourselves, a people too sane for vision. Jerusalem also stoned the prophets and slew them that were sent unto her. Her subsequent destiny seems, at the moment, to be repeating itself with some grim parallels.

But the great, germinating principle of imagination is there; it is our quality. We have merely succeeded in producing a fantastic paradox, convincing ourselves that the quality in which our virtue chiefly lives must be stamped out as a dangerous weakness.

It may be urged at this point that there is also some danger in becoming conscious of your virtue. Certainly there is, if your interest lies mainly in yourself as its vehicle or medium. But few people who enter upon the practice of artistic or religious exercise have much time or inclination to examine the process from the outside, and the exercise of the imagination is at root identical with one or both of these. No very great spiritual dangers

await us, I think, if we clear our minds of this particular cant and enter more consciously into the heritage of our supreme power, exploring, as in a religious discipline, the steps by which it may be developed, so that a *virtu ordinata* may take the place of inertia in one part of the community and of haphazard outbreaks in others of a suppressed and misunderstood force.

U. E.-F.

London, January 1942

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The debt of thought to writers and to friends living and dead is, as always, difficult, if not impossible, to acknowledge suitably. Two exceptions among living writers may perhaps be made. By Mr. Maurice L. Rowntree's *Mankind Set Free* this book was in some degree occasioned, and to certain suggestions in that work and to others again in Mr. T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion* it probably owes more than to the work of any other living author.

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I

MECHANISED MAN

Hell is the home of the unreal and of the seekers for happiness. It is the only refuge from heaven, which is . . . the home of the masters of reality, and from earth, which is the home of the slaves of reality. G. B. SHAW: *Man and Superman*, Act III.

I

MECHANISED MAN

WHEN THE distracted citizen of to-day applies his mind to the problems of the world about him, he feels as though he were being carried back to the algebraical nightmares of his unmathematical childhood, when all the sums seemed to have an irreducible number of "x"s, "y"s, and "z"s, which no amount of toil could convert into specific values or actual figures. The known values were too few, and the unknown too numerous and too cunningly interdependent for solution. At the end of it all he seemed veritably to have toiled all the night and produced nothing—except pages of fruitless recombinations of these unknowns, predestined, as he miserably foresaw, to a large blue-pencilled "W" in the margin and the disparaging verdict, "0."

Are we producing anything better to-day by the efforts of our slightly maturer minds to fix values in a world whose formulas are the laws of business, trade, finance, economic relations, international politics and a jumble of other factors and abstractions about which we know nothing, about which we desperately need to make some judgment, but which offer (though there is apparently no end to the recombinations and interactions that can be made) no prospect of explanation in terms of the plain facts and familiar experience of everyday life? As far as our daily life goes, we stand on familiar ground, even though it is subject to earthquakes increasingly frequent and severe. But with those surrounding elements which, as far as we can judge, are responsible for the earthquake in our immediate neighbourhood, we have long had no satisfying relationship. They affect us, but are apparently unaffected by us. They cannot be connected by a definite

series of steps with the world we know. They are, in fact, in a slightly different guise, the unpredictable but predominantly malicious deities of the primeval jungle come back again to terrify, bewilder and enslave. We may not always put it like this, but in fact, to the plain, thinking man, the nightmares of his childhood have returned, the imperative need to find a solution, the haunting suspicion that he will never "make it come out".

The problem before him now is how his influence, minute as it is, can and ought to be exercised. He can see no way to express his opinions or beliefs except through the medium of his vote at local or general elections and his membership, perhaps, of one or two societies. This hardly seems to affect directly the problems of wealth and poverty, unemployment, disease, taxation and war. Moreover, before he can exercise even this weak and indirect influence, he must have an understanding of the measures necessary to cure the evils and enough knowledge of the mechanism of government to judge how nearly the policy offered by a given party or individual is likely to further his own ideals. Needless to say, he very seldom has either of these.

By the time we have reached this conclusion we are generally conscious of two alternatives. We can acquiesce in, or adapt ourselves to the situation, which generally means little more than disregarding it and occupying ourselves with something else, or we can stick to our determination to make our way through it. If we acquiesce, doing, in fact what most of us have done all too long, we are deliberately contributing our share—the share of one unit of society each—to the spiritual disintegration of mankind; and this has already advanced to the stage at which it is being manifested in the destruction of civilisation itself. If we determine to make a counter-attack—again, to the extent of one unit of society each—we commit ourselves to a task from the arduousness of which there is no reason to expect remission in this world. It

is a hard choice, and we may well hesitate, asking ourselves, perhaps, whether we had not better, after all, acquiesce in a way of life bestowed upon us by our fathers that begat us the Governments that have organised us.

From us average citizens of to-day who have no specialised political, economic or sociological knowledge and the greater part of whose time is occupied, in any case, in earning our livings, this kind of decision has not hitherto been demanded. We could, if we wished, postpone establishing a responsible relationship with our whole environment and acquiring thereby the necessary qualification for reliable judgment; we could acquiesce in a life that does not bother to look ahead of the immediate practical issue. We could, even if we used our votes and thereby expressed some sort of opinion (a thing not necessarily related to the exercise of judgment), remain in the position which Burke described as neither "safe" nor "manly", having, as he puts it, "fresh principles to seek upon every fresh mail which should arrive from America". But we cannot do this much longer nor avoid observing that the consequences of this practice are already upon us in unmistakable form. Up to now we have not necessarily been brought to account by any factor external to our own consciences; if we preferred them to remain inoperative it was possible to drift on in automatic relation to our environment, taking it all for granted until we stumbled against some part of it—even then, perhaps, eliminating unpleasant reflexions by avoiding further contact with that area of thought or experience. We could, to use a phrase frequently borrowed (apparently with no ironic intention) from certain writers upon biological science "adapt to the environment". We could acquiesce passively, altering ourselves to suit it, rather than opening our eyes upon the problem of altering it to suit us.¹

¹ This essay does not attempt to suggest specific alterations, but rather to discover the means by which we may qualify ourselves to make them.

But if we can do no better with what environs us to-day than adapt ourselves to it, we can hardly complain if the human race shortly finds itself with the dinosaurs. (The dinosaurs may complain, however, for they, apparently, put up some kind of a fight.) Adaptation to environment may be a virtue beyond price (though in these matters I have no exact information) in a bacillus, an amoeba, an alga, a bacterium, in mycelium or even in some slightly higher orders of the vegetable or animal kingdoms. But on the mental plane, and in man, who is a thinking being, the spiritual associate, if he will, of the power that informs the universe, it is that plain and deadly thing, an act of blasphemy.

Suppose, then, an ordinary man of the present day were to reject the alternative of acquiescence in the state of things about him and determine, inadequately qualified as he is, to venture upon an effort to understand, what prospect would await him? He will have realised already that mere unhappy wandering round the ring of unknowns that hem him in will not be likely to show him a hitherto undiscovered short-cut out of the nightmare. That has been tried too often and tried by those who, if any, have the specialised qualifications for finding it. And yet he may agree that the time for acquiescence is over. Most of us by now are attempting to clear our minds upon the causes and effects of a situation which includes poverty, unemployment, economic rivalry and war, and upon the nature of the conditions that surround us. Some of us, in the presence of calamity, do not get much beyond conscientious, intermittent worrying, the equivalent of our "adaptation to environment" while misfortune was further off. Neither of these will, unfortunately, get us very far. "Indifference will not guide nations through civilisation to the establishment of the perfect city of God",¹ and neither will, what many of us substitute at the present moment, the rending of our garments. Our

¹ *Back to Methuselah*, Preface, lxxii (ed. 1931).

anxiety and distress, genuine as they feel, are sometimes only an attempt to avoid the very thing that would have helped us or that still can, a just and unflinching inspection of fact. The only thing that will satisfy our desire for action is some practical expression of a conviction, whether in the form of political action at the one extreme or of clearly held opinion at the other. And the necessary preliminary to either of these is definite knowledge.

What, I believe, besets most hardly the average man or woman to-day is the sense that, in spite of his ignorance of the nature of the forces which control his life, material, social and political, he in some degree helps to create them. Certain major problems meet him every time he opens a newspaper: there have been long unemployment, slums, crime, disease; there is now totalitarian war. Either he feels that nothing he can do will touch any of these, or he finds himself surrounded by advocates of this or that solution of this or that problem, many of them either contradictory within their own sphere of application or incompatible with the solution proposed for an adjacent problem. He feels himself caught up in a frantic gyration of potential actions, forces, repercussions and unsystematised responses, none of them stabilised in relation either to him or to each other. Even the evils themselves which seem actual enough are variously interpreted as inherent necessities, as by-products of some form of good, as relatively unimportant in comparison with some overruling need (such as organisation for war) or with some underlying law (such as that of "the economic state"). All this gets him nowhere. What he wants is to know where his own responsibility lies. Comprehending dimly that none of these things need be quite as they are and some of them could be destroyed altogether if every one refused to permit them, he must infer that a proportion of the responsibility for their continued existence rests upon him. What, then, shall he do about it? Where shall he begin, and how? What is, after all, the nature of

his responsibility? He cannot, in the leisure time of earning a living, take action on a large scale. Each problem requires expert knowledge from the would-be reformer. It requires moreover time, money and, if anything permanent is to be achieved, the co-operation of a number of people similarly equipped. He cannot tackle the problem of crime without a knowledge at least of law, psychology or the prison system, nor the problem of disease without a training in medicine and social hygiene, and both of these are inextricably bound up with and need expert knowledge of the problems of slums and of unemployment. These, which are merely some of the most obvious examples, are all jobs for experts, and yet, paradoxically, he must be responsible, to the extent of a one-in-so-many-million share, since they only exist so long as society acquiesces and he is just that proportion of society. And war, that final disaster, upon which all of these have had a direct bearing, for that too he is responsible, in part directly by his assent to it, in part indirectly, through his responsibility for the others. About that too he must "make up his mind", vote or not vote, protest or not protest, support or oppose—and take the consequences. It is easy, in modern society, to see that we are all members one of another. But the function of the individual member in preserving or restoring the health of the whole body, that is the oppressive problem for the plain man who is not a doctor, a psychologist, a scientific researcher, a social worker or a politician. Perhaps, even, for the plain man who is.

But if he cannot take action in any particular sphere, perhaps, he will argue, he can at least inform himself about the outstanding ills of our society. So he can, if he has enough leisure to read a succession of books on all these matters and a host of other contingent questions, and if he has the good fortune to choose and obtain the books which will give him substantial information. I think that the man who would devote the leisure-time of

several years to this pursuit would, at the end, have made himself a competent speculative citizen. I think this mass of information, held by a mind sufficiently trained to systematise what it must of necessity often obtain in unsystematic form, would have undoubtedly a certain value. But I think the man who has the leisure and the means to do this is hardly representative of the mass of black-coat workers and small professional people, living in the suburbs of great cities, who make up this huge, social, economic and political factor incalculable to their governments and to themselves. And, even given the best possible opportunity for selecting information from the torrent of material generously provided by our presses, left, right and centre, I am not sure that it would automatically lead to sound judgment. It might lead, at the worst, to mental indigestion, and at best to a state of affairs in which the complexities of the situation were indeed better known, but not the issues.¹ Information is indispensable to judgment, but more fundamental than information and the necessary preliminary to any wise use of it is the ability to assess the implications in a situation or policy, their relation to other processes and tendencies. And for this there is required a habit of mind that is vigorous and constructive, not merely acquisitive. Has the citizen of to-day preserved this power or has he imperceptibly allowed it to atrophy?

It is perhaps worth while to notice in this connection how often the accumulation of detailed knowledge, without any centring of judgment, ends by overwhelming us with a sense of the peculiar intricacy of our own problems and leaves us with an impression of the relative ease of those that confront other people. We seize the excuse to turn aside from our difficulties. We reflect on the case of some other problem. How much clearer the issue is there,

¹ I do not, of course, mean to imply that, because he cannot master all these fields, he should make no attempt to explore them at all. Far from it. But I do suggest that this kind of knowledge by itself is not enough.

how much more obvious the steps to be taken for its elucidation, how plain and how inevitable their order. Armed with the authority, for instance, of Abraham Lincoln, how simple it must have been to proclaim and maintain the abolition of an evil, from which the world should be "Thenceforward and forever free". The evils of another age or society look different, more susceptible of reform, and bear, it would seem, indications of how they were to be cured. Looked at from this angle, everything achieved by the past, from the Habeas Corpus Act down to prison reform, adult suffrage and the education of women, was brought about by a series of plain, definite actions along lines that led direct to their object. But in the welter of interdependent contingencies with which we are concerned to-day there are no plain roads laid down.

This, of course, is just silly. But it is the characteristic silliness of a tired, badgered, well-intentioned man who desperately wants to find a clue to the tangle and indulges in the supposition that, for his particular tangle (and for that only) no clue exists. The simple fact is that the roads by which the great reformers reached their objects are plain because they made them so; there was never, at any time, a road before them, though, naturally enough, there was always one behind. Abraham Lincoln was not born President of the United States; nor do the problems involved in the relations between the Federal Constitution and the Judiciary, the "free" and the "slave" States, the Republican and Democratic parties, or of all these to each other and to the theory of popular sovereignty or to Territorial and State constitutions, as revealed in the election speeches of 1858, make particularly simple reading, even at this distance of time. But one thing stands out significantly. Abraham Lincoln spoke with authority because he *had* authority, born of a life-time's disciplining of the mind towards justice and wisdom in the spirit of goodwill and imaginative common sense. His strength

was rooted in what he was, which must always precede what a man does. A great people, at its wit's end and on the eve of civil war, accepted the leadership of a man who had spent his life as a lawyer in an up-State town, because of qualities in him which were neither acquiescence on the one hand nor theoretical and speculative knowledge on the other; because he had in him a root of positive faith and a habit of thought which informed his judgment in its working upon circumstance and event. That another Abraham Lincoln would save Europe to-day is a truism, and there is not much comfort in repeating it. But there is something to be gained, in recalling to mind the processes of that liberal, shrewd and imaginative intelligence. . . .

The past will not solve our problem for us, though it may give us not only an example which we can bear in mind, but a warning hint of how deep is our desire to look at anything rather than the problem in front of us. But that problem is still there.

We have so far made but a blundering attack upon our difficulties, but I think it is the course that many of us take at the beginning. Our first instinct is for energetic action. When we feel ourselves unqualified for that, we have an impulse "to learn all about it", as a preparation for action. And when we realise the magnitude of that task we ask what other people have made of their problems in the past, and, before we know where we are, we are deciding that the fault is in our stars, not in ourselves. We have, in fact, done little more than run round a circle hunting for ways of escape from an intolerable situation, and we should do better to break off that practice and acknowledge that none of these constitutes an unflinching inspection of fact, or, at least, not of that aspect of the facts which we are best qualified to consider. This lies altogether nearer at hand. We have been busy at the circumference of our experience and have lost sight of the centre. We are, it is true, no longer acquiescing; but there

is not much to be made of an unavailing protest that batters itself against the surrounding circumstances and fails to take account of the one factor which can be made to yield up facts—*itself*.

Suppose, then, that we approach the problem in quite a different way, turn our backs on it, not in an effort to escape, but in deference to its paradoxical nature. This sounds a little like the advice given to Alice to approach the hill by walking away from it up the garden path. But we remember that, in the Looking Glass world, which is so much more like the world we know than the picture that statisticians and economists offer us, this had a satisfactory result and she found herself "full in sight of the hill she had so long been aiming at". Suppose, in other words, that we come back to ourselves, the individuals, each with his need to establish with his surroundings a relationship that shall satisfy his demand for reality. With each man's own individuality as the provisional centre of his universe and with the demand for a sense of reality in our relations with it as our first demand upon ourselves, let us begin to work outward, leaving aside, for the moment, the connection with the circumference and trying instead to establish a nucleus of realities around ourselves. This process of finding a centre may mean leaving go of the world-problems and examining first the nature of our relationship with the every-day world about us. When we are satisfied that we have established an understanding relationship with that perhaps we can push out to the surrounding generalities, carrying with us it may be certain principles, or certain habits of mind, which will determine our responses. In exploring the world immediately about us we may perhaps discover not only the nature of that world, but also, with some dismay, something about our own attitude to it. When we have realised what is our attitude to the every day world that we see and touch and take for granted and desecrate, we shall have discovered perhaps the source of the unreality

that intervenes between us and the wider world in which the common citizen with his wireless set, being multiplied by millions, has become a mechanised army.

This, then, is the subject of this essay and this is the nature of the group of facts which we want to examine. I am not concerned to speak of any of these major problems in themselves. I am attempting as nearly as possible the opposite of that; to suggest the nature of the responsibility of the individual citizen towards the world he lives in, to its resources, facilities and potentialities, and, through them, towards the wider world over which he appears to have so little control; to describe what I believe to be some of the causes of his sense of dislocation, and of the progress of those evils which, by reason of this sense of unreality, he has not contributed his share to arrest. I believe we can trace both his sense of unreality and the consequent failure to meet his responsibilities, immediate or distant, to a cause that lies somewhat inward, to an abuse of certain of the functions of his own mind, which is assuming alarming proportions in modern civilisation.

We may start, then, from the assumption—which, indeed, puts no great strain on our credulity—that we are each and all of us individually responsible, in varying degrees and with greater or less directness, for the condition of the world we live in. That, you will observe, is the exact opposite of assuming that we are conditioned by the world we live in and generally meets with a good deal of opposition from those people in whom the instinct to classify their fellow creatures as things conditioned mainly by laws, themselves of disputable function, amounts almost to an aberration. But we are not, for the purposes of meeting the appalling responsibility of thought, the component parts of any group or class or nation or race; we are not “man”, that elusive abstraction, nor even that still more unreal figment “economic man”; we are not “masses”, simply because “masses” are *men*.

As men, then, free, if nowhere else, in the inner citadel of thought, we have each to give to ourselves some account of the contributions we have individually made to the condition of the world to-day, and we may be assured that our own judgment upon ourselves will not condemn positive misconduct only; it will "debit what is negative against us" as certainly as it did against Peer Gynt or against the prudent citizen in the parable who wrapped his talent in a napkin and buried it to be on the safe side. We may expect, that is, to find ourselves charged with lethargy, indifference, dullness, and that vice of despondent indolence that the Middle Ages called *accidie* and classed with the Seven Deadly Sins.

Certain forms of mental indolence are always with us. We would, on the whole, rather be safe than wise and certainly most of us would rather be happy than blessed. But a new factor has come into everyday life in the last hundred years that makes it more than ever perilous to submit to this inertia. The mechanisation of daily life, which has accelerated since the beginning of the twentieth century and yet again since the war of 1914-18, has offered a plethora of new facilities which, if abused, cease to be privileges and become, first hindrances to mental life and then threats to the civilisation that begot them. What Wordsworth calls "the lethargy of custom", what is generally known to-day as the tendency to take things for granted, is a deadly thing, a kind of sleeping sickness of the spirit which is at all times hard to combat.¹ And until recently an alarmingly large proportion of safe lives in England, America and elsewhere were relieved, in an ever-increasing degree, from the need to examine their environment alertly. Nothing sinister was likely to happen to them if they took practically everything for

¹ Some conditions of life, of course, and some phases of civilisation help to counteract it; we should not expect to find it at its worst in a nomad Arab, a Chicago gangster, a spy working in enemy territory, or the coxswain of the local lifeboat. These men, to cite only a few, must keep an intent (some of them even a suspicious) watch on their material or social environment.

granted except the traffic lights. They could, if they wished, go through all the rest of the routine part of their daily lives sub-consciously absorbed in the calculation of football pools without being a penny the worse for it in body or estate. Provided they applied their minds adequately to the business by which they earned their livings and to their relations with the people with whom they came in most frequent contact, they could go and come upon their lawful occasions very comfortably without bestowing upon God's universe (which is, indeed, for the most part concealed by man's mechanism) the compliment of one qualm of awe, one pause of wonder or one flash of thankfulness. Many town dwellers did so for the greater part of their time and nearly all of us lapsed into it for shorter or longer stretches.

For the "lethargy of custom" has a double hold upon the mind of the modern man cradled (or is it stifled?) in mechanisation. There is, in the first place, his natural tendency not to think or notice more than he can help, which gives good rooting ground for the growth. This will always take advantage of a mechanical device to spare invention or even the act of curiosity, so that an astonishing proportion of his movements are concerned with pressing buttons, turning on switches and taps or lifting receivers and taking the results for granted. But there is besides an almost protective avoidance of alertness of mind, a perhaps unconscious but certainly pardonable refusal of attention. With his ears assaulted by broadcast announcements, megaphones at station junctions, motor-horns, bells, whistles, gramophones all trying to gain his attention, with his eyes similarly besieged by newspaper placards, advertisements in papers, tube trains and buses and (until recently) illuminated sky signs, all urging him to do, buy or notice something, he is in real danger of contracting a kind of irritable hyperaesthesia, which submissively notices and registers without discrimination everything it is told to notice. He therefore takes refuge

from this in indifference. But resisting the appeal to buy somebody's engines, butter, soap, publications, patent medicines or personally conducted travel tours too easily extends to include everything which, in the course of our daily coming and going, offers itself as experience to the senses or for reflexion to the mind. One cause of his condition, then, is clear enough to see.

But this does not alter the fact that the condition is itself a disease of the spirit and neither he nor society will be relieved of the consequences of contracting the malady by the fact that he is exposed to unusually severe infection. The task of the modern hard-worked townsman who wants to remain on a footing of reality with his surroundings is probably greater than that of any previous generation, but this does not alter the fact that mental somnambulism in men and nations is a fatal condition. Fatal, because to have no real, living relationship with the things near at hand is to have none with the great problems which, though they seem further off, are, we suspect, the composite result of the attitudes towards the business of living taken up by some millions of individual minds. Fatal also, because this protective lethargy with its stifling of the sense of wonder has a disastrous effect upon the mind itself, setting up a steady deterioration. A universe in chaos may well be no more than the product of a long series of judgments from deteriorated minds.

For it would appear to be an inevitable law that the abuse instead of the use of anything damages not so much the thing abused as the abuser. We are familiar enough now with the effect upon the mind of this kind of irreverence in the sphere, for instance, of nature and natural beauty. When we read of Peter Bell that:

A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him
And it was nothing more

we understand, at least in part, how he had become the man we meet at the beginning of the poem. When we

read Wordsworth's description of his own feelings as a boy looking back on the mutilated hazel wood when he turned to leave it exulting in his plunder, we recognise, in clearer definition, something we have ourselves experienced when haste or preoccupation or emotion has made us treat with disregard or discourtesy the essential quality of a tree, a wood, a field.¹ But most of us are less aware of outrage when this is done to the beings or to the services of things we call inanimate; we feel at most a faint uneasiness which we find hard to diagnose and push aside with other vague, unanalysed discomforts of the mind. Yet on one side, at least, the experience is the same. Whether we call it insensitiveness, callousness, greediness or thanklessness, it is an abuse of what surrounds us, recoiling upon our own spirits more than upon those of the things we abuse. And that faint uneasiness so difficult to diagnose is often our only intimation of the evil that is at work. In a world in which simplicity has been largely driven out of the lives of all but a few determined and independent individuals, the mere multitude of the things about us tends to force this condition upon us; it dulls our responses, just as a walk along Oxford Street at three o'clock on a week-day afternoon dulls, for a time at least, the eagerness of our enthusiasm for the human race. A man whose normal day brings him successively in contact with a geyser, an electric cooker, an electric stove, a patent breakfast food, a newspaper, a motor omnibus, an underground railway, a moving staircase, a typewriter, a tape machine, a telephone, a wireless set and a cinema, has some difficulty in maintaining a spirit of wonder towards man's inventions; he is beset by them, plagued by them, and, in self-defence, takes refuge in indifference

¹ The same thought as underlies that of Wordsworth is more explicitly rendered by William Penn: "For how could man find the confidence to abuse it [the world] while they should see the Great Creator look them in the face in all and every part thereof? . . . That insensibility hardly misusing this noble creation that has the stamp and voice of a deity everywhere. . . . That is lost that is misused" (*Some Fruits of Solitude*, I, 13, 14, 70).

to them. This indifference may lead to a gradually thickening fog of boredom, and as a remedy against this he turns to the stimulus of the amusements and entertainments provided for him (generally by means of yet further mechanical inventions) with the least possible effort from his side. This habit again leads to an increasing disability; he becomes gradually unable to fill his leisure in any other way and tends to make a more and more indolent response even to the stimuli themselves. The effect of this, again, is to deepen the atmosphere of morose boredom (the direct result of the sluggishness of mental habit) and so a fresh and still more vicious circle is set up. The initial acts of rejection, the attitude which takes for granted the geyser, the electric stove, the typewriter and the tube train, end by interposing a barrier between him and all aesthetic experience or activity of mind; curiosity, absorption, concentration, joy or critical judgment. Living indifferently in a world of mechanical wonders has destroyed his capacity for wonder as surely as indifference to the primrose ended by destroying it in Peter Bell.

The modern man's disease, then, is a form of plethora. Or, to be more exact, one of the predisposing conditions for the development of the disease is an excess of those things which, at first glance, would seem to safeguard him against it. That heritage of unbelievable wealth, our mechanised civilisation, has been converted into a curse¹ and we starve in the midst of plenty, not only in that sense which has become a commonplace of popular economics, but inwardly and spiritually also. We might even carry the analogy further and suggest that the causes are similar on the two planes and that in the world of mental and spiritual experience also our misfortune is not so much over-production as under-consumption. We

¹ The curse involved in the diversion of scientific invention to the service of war is too plain to need comment. The evil I suggest here is another, and deeper-lying; an evil of which war itself is a result and in some degree a manifestation.

have far more at our disposal of material and technical facilities than any other civilisation of which any ample record has survived, but our achievement in happiness, wisdom and spiritual vigour often falls woefully short of theirs, and shorter still of what might reasonably be expected from our abundance. The means are there, but because of some inability to come to terms with these means, the results are lacking. This, as we have begun to see, must ultimately be because of the individual's failure to come to terms with his immediate environment, with the means which lie within his reach.

At this stage of their reflections a certain number of people will wonder whether the cure would not be best made by the removal of the conditions, whether the abolition of machinery carried out by the inhabitants of Erewhon was not after all the best solution. Leaving aside the by no means negligible question of the practical difficulties involved, is this the right principle? I doubt whether the removal of conditions favourable to a cause can ever be an effective substitute for the removal of that cause itself, whether that is, the changing of man's surroundings (even could it be achieved) will of itself do the work of changing his soul. I suspect, in fact, that the policy of Erewhon leads us precisely to—Nowhere. This is not to say that in some cases it may not be a valuable aid, if, but only if, the major work is itself in hand. Creative poverty and voluntary simplicity, whether in individual or communal lives would, as many men feel to-day, have a valuable influence on our civilisation. But it is to be noticed, in the first place, that this is only sought by men who have in effect already begun to practise it in their own imaginations and are therefore already at work upon removing the cause, and, in the second place, that at present the extreme part of their programme is impracticable for ordinary people's lives. What is needed for those lives is, rather, a changed orientation to our environment while that environment is

still here, and this, moreover, happens to be the one thing which, however hard it is, is within the immediate control of each individual. It is not for nothing that from time to time men question whether our wealth of means is not the direct cause of poverty of result; but if we throw away half our possessions without changing the attitudes of our minds, there is no guarantee that we should live the better with the other half. Maybe it is better to enter the Kingdom of Heaven having only one eye than, keeping both, to fall into the everlasting fire; but it is better still to assume that we have two because we are intended to find out how to use them. An attempt at understanding and mastery is, here as everywhere, better than escape, unless and until it be proved impossible to achieve. It is sometimes better, as every mountaineer knows, to suspect that you are on the wrong road and turn back rather than to assume that it will bring you out all right, or to try a cross-country break to pick up the right track. It may, indeed, come to this with us, but we have not gone far yet along this road of mechanised civilisation and it is too soon to be sure that it is an altogether false trail. It seems, rather, a case for cool consultation of the map and the compass, for the error may lie in our own way of looking at the landscape. In any case, we have brought ourselves to a situation which has no safe exit, and the sooner we realise that the only courses open to us are all hard ones, the better. All that we can feel reasonably sure about is that we have not yet learnt to use our resources. I think we shall hardly get out of this situation by continuing to abuse them and probably not by turning our backs on them. In some way we are responsible for the fact that society has not made an intelligent, imaginative and constructive use of its new accessions of power, the technical resources of wireless telegraphy, motion photography, transport, telephonic and other postal communications, the press, the book-trade, the findings of chemical, medical and psychological research, the

essential civic and domestic services of local governments. We are confronted with a world many of whose citizens take these for granted (even while relying entirely upon them for their comfort and entertainment), losing sight at once of their origins on the one hand and their possibilities on the other. This can only debase the mind which uses and depends continually on things of whose nature it knows and cares nothing. But the admission of this fact is only our first step towards rebuilding our credit as thinking beings and as men of reasonable goodwill. And because, before we can take even the most indirect action towards the reconstruction of our wider environment, we must qualify ourselves by some means and become a people of sane judgment navigated by some kind of constructive faith, this essay attempts not to outline the various items of reconstruction, reform or extension which seem to be called for, but to suggest what are those defects in our every-day attitude to our immediate world through which the present condition of affairs has come about, and by what process some of our unexamined habits might be redirected so that we should become eligible for the citizenship of "no mean city".

In order to bring this down to plain practical terms, let us make for ourselves three imaginary portraits, first that of an ordinary man of somewhat over a hundred years ago, living through a short section of his everyday life in the material surroundings common to countrymen of his time, then one of a man of our own day whose mind has been conditioned by our material surroundings, and, finally, one of a man living in the world of to-day, but bringing to it an attitude of mind akin to that of an age not subdued by mechanisation.

The first man will live in a world as yet untouched by those facilities and resources we have just considered: transport and communication will be primitive and practically unmechanised; the necessities of life—light, heat, clothing, food—will have to be procured much

nearer their source than they are for us and the procuring of them will itself be dependent on much simpler processes of purchase and transport; his leisure will not be filled for him by the wireless programme and the local picture house; the daily news will not reach his Cumberland valley in the form of a daily paper, and books will penetrate slowly; scientific discovery will be almost unknown to him, unless he is of a persistent and enquiring temperament; and for the elaborate organisation of local government he will have to substitute the intelligent, friendly co-operation of a small, self-governing community. What, if anything, will there be of the mental food and stimulus upon which the modern townsman relies? What, if anything, will he substitute for it? Will the balance be gain or loss? Suppose we imagine a dalesman of the early nineteenth century, such a man as the Wordsworths often found among their neighbours,¹ and follow this man through a part of his daily life, shall we perhaps discover not only in the resources on which he draws, but in the processes and habits of his mind (formed by life-long reliance on those resources) something which may illuminate our own malady?

¹ Readers of the letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth will, I fear, object that I have made free with historical detail, with the relative positions of certain events, and, in fact, behaved irresponsibly towards the material I have used. My object was not to give a historical picture, but a study of a certain kind of mind. The conditions described here happened, I believe, to be peculiarly favourable to the growth of these characteristic qualities; the ideal picture of John Smith could be most rapidly and economically presented in terms of that kind of civilisation.

II
THREE PICTURES

We have driven the living imagination out of the world.

W. B. YEATS.

II

THREE PICTURES

I

IT IS a mild evening in September towards the beginning of last century, in a small market-town in the hills, when we first come across John Smith standing, with his stick in his hand, looking up and down the main street in the cool twilight. The sun is not set, but the high fells to the west throw the little town into shadow, while a golden glow still rests on the long shoulder of the hillside to the east.

"Have you much to carry, John?"

The grocer comes out from the darkness of his general store, as John turns towards the north, prepared to set out for home.

"Can you carry the postal packets over with you? It'll be a week before the carrier is back here and I thought maybe you could leave them as you passed."

"I will indeed. It'll be Tuesday before John Green is over our way with the cart. Give them me. My bag's almost empty, and they are no weight."

(There is, we may remember, no road between the little town and the village to which John is going; so the carrier's cart, which distributes the letters and parcels left by the mail coaches from the larger towns, touches it only once a week by a roundabout road through the valley. It is therefore natural to these hillmen to know each other's affairs and to carry messages or mail for their neighbours as they go to and fro.)¹

¹ Dorothy and William Wordsworth, when they first settled in Grasmere, remarked the friendliness and self-reliance of these small communities: "The people we have uniformly found kind-hearted, frank and manly, prompt to serve without servility." . . . "We are very comfortably situated in respect to neighbours of the lower classes, they are excellent people, friendly in performing all offices of kindness and humanity, and attentive to us without servility—if we were sick they would wait upon us night and day" (*Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt, Nos. 105, 110).

John Smith stows the packets in his knapsack, settles it on his back, picks up his staff again and sets out up the still, grey street northward at the slow pace of a mountain man. It is a fine night and the five miles over the low pass between the two lakes a pleasant walk. Besides, he reckons, the moon will rise in half an hour, just in time to light the track at the top of the pass when the twilight begins to fail. As he gets clear of the town, the road lies straight before him; ahead the lower fells close in on both sides, grey under a pale sky where stars are beginning to shine.

John Smith has walked this road twice a day, winter and summer, for ten years now, and except for the time of the great snow has never consented to stay down in the town, however wild or cold or dark the night may be. In mid-winter he starts from home with a lantern in the dark morning and comes back if need be by the same lantern on the sheep-track over the pass at night. But for the most part he does not use it, for, as he says, there is always some light in the sky, except in the thickest of rain or fog, and if a man blinds himself with a lantern he cannot see the stars. It is commonly said of him that he knows the pass as even the shepherds do not and that on the darkest night he can tell whether he has missed the track by the feel of the ground under his feet, when he cannot use his eyes.¹ In the early days his friends tried to argue him out of this habit and persuade him to move into the town and live in the roomy house over the shop in the main street. But neither John nor his wife will give

¹ Dorothy Wordsworth describes an every-day occurrence of this kind; the emergency and the skill which met it are commonplaces in the lives of men living in isolated mountain districts, then as now: "We lost our path and could see the tarn no longer. We made our way out with difficulty, guided by a heap of stones which we remembered. We were afraid of being bewildered in the mists, till the darkness should overtake us. We were long before we knew that we were in the right track, but thanks to William's skill we knew it long before we could see our way before us. There was no footmark upon the snow either of man or beast" (*Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, January 23, 1802). To-day one would take a compass on a walk of this kind: the men of Wordsworth's day relied, apparently, on their own skill.

up the cottage in the hamlet on the shore of the lake. And as for the walk, there is a kind of sober joy in it that he would not willingly forego. He himself will say when questioned that it gives him time to think. Being a plain man who knows no reason not to speak his thought, he will admit, in the right company, that it gives him time to pray.

(I think we are already in sight of one of the chief differences between his way of life and ours. He wastes a good deal of time every day in walking ten miles to and from his work, whereas we spend an average of half-an-hour in the train and can employ even that profitably in reading the morning and evening paper. Or, to look at it from another position, he spends rather over two hours every day in an occupation which, of all others, is best calculated to free the mind for observation and imaginative contemplation, while we are only too likely to use the time we suppose ourselves to have gained in subjecting our minds to an excess of those mechanical and unrelated stimuli which lie all too ready for our hands.)

On some nights, as he approaches the pass itself at the end of the first two miles of his walk, a soft brightness in the sky to the south-east begins to spread over the new-shorn fields he has left behind. He turns to look back at the slowly broadening valley that stretches down to the lake and to the wall of the high fells behind. It is a sight he always pauses to look at, by daylight or starlight, as often as it can be seen. The harvest is late this year and in some fields the oats are not yet carried, so that, when the radiant disc of the moon comes up above the skyline it begins to throw long shadows from the stooks across the grey-brown fields below. There is little wind, only enough to bring down from the foot-hills the undefinable scent, keen, sweet, and cool, from the high fells beyond; it stirs the dried heads of the withered summer grasses by the roadside as it passes. Except when an icy wind blows down the pass from the north John Smith always loiters on this part of the road for, summer and winter, night

and morning, it gives him peculiar pleasure. He has seen very few paintings and never, of course, an illustrated paper, a poster or a picture post-card, much less a moving picture. That part of his mind which depends on beauty for its satisfaction and education must take its food direct from the sources, from nature itself and the elements of beauty in natural sights. There is no colour-printing, publishing or cinematograph industry to select it for him and bring it to his notice. He loses much that is within our reach; but I doubt whether he loses much that is within our grasp. The experience which he eventually reaches owes nothing to any man's intervention; by a just consequence it is of that order of joy which "no man taketh from" him. Always, as he draws near to the tops and the sky spreads wide and high about him, something that he thinks of almost as a presence, the being of the solitary hills, begins to meet him. We may watch him as he stands a moment tracing the position of the stars, now growing clearer as the blue of the sky deepens. There, half-way up the sky to his left, in the north west, is the Bear, and straight ahead of him the Pole star. He has known from childhood where to look, night by night, for each constellation, but he still watches with undiminished wonder the steady light of the north star. To-night as often he thinks of his brother, the skipper of a small coastal trading boat, who will be steering, far out to sea, by that same star, making towards Whitehaven it might be, or Cockermouth.

John Smith has an advantage over the modern townsman in that, seeing the stars night by night, unhindered by masonry or smoke, and using them as his guides, he has a quickened sense both of their function and of the ways of life of other men who depend on them as he does. Like Wordsworth's shepherd, who

had been alone
Amid the heart of many thousand mists
That came to him, and left him, on the heights

he possesses an experience which cannot be attained by the most assiduous use of the facilities of modern transport. He makes his own way, moving from place to place by reference to the original signs of direction: this is a different process from that which selects, with the help of the *A.B.C.*, a given route out of a number already provided by the transport authorities.

When he has crossed the pass and the track begins to dip slowly down on the further side, this sound of water becomes more distinct; it is the low gurgle of a small stream dropping over rocks, like human voices approaching from far away. It meets him further up the pass than usual to-night; this is always so on a clear, dry night. In a thick mist, or in rain, you may almost come up to it before you hear it. With ears accustomed to notice and account for everything he hears, he knows every sound that belongs to the fells, and their variations are as familiar to him as the different shapes and shadows under the light of sun or moon or stars. His power of observing and interpreting has never been deadened by a stream of meaningless noises to which he must in self-defence become indifferent and his curiosity has been unblunted by popular science made easy by cheap journalism.

Where the stream runs across the road he turns aside a few steps, stooping down to drink where the clear water falls over a rock in a little, unbroken cascade. He is generally thirsty by the time he reaches this stream, and water straight off the fells tastes like no other drink in the world—better, almost, than his glass of ale at breakfast or the pot of hot tea that Ellen brews for him when he reaches home on a frosty night.

As he stands up, drying his mouth and the hand he has used to scoop up the water, he falls into thinking of these springs that rise up pure and cold and clear from deep down in the mountains to well out again high up on the fells here, so that men can live and make their homes on the upland pastures without fear of drought in the hottest

summer. Always, there is water here for man and beast. But in the chalk hills in the south, it is different. There, a dry summer means dying cattle on the upland farms, and the water for the men themselves must be carted up from the streams or wells in the plain below. There is a world of difference between the chalk hills and these great granite hills, where, though late rains may rot the harvest and winter snow cut off here and there an isolated farm, there is never dearth of water. Take it all in all, John prefers the granite; but soils and climates—they are interesting things, with all that follows from them; the different ways men learn to work the land, the different ways they live themselves.

Perhaps if John Smith had had the benefit of a modern suburban education, he would never have stood on a mountainside fumbling with these relatively simple problems and solutions; the whole matter would have been put before him in an elementary text-book before he had thought of being curious about it at all. But this forcible feeding on information unrelated to his surroundings (and therefore undesired) would have gradually checked that appetite for enquiry itself. So that a John Smith reared in a modern suburb, though he might have put Wordsworth's peasants to shame with his glib facility of expression, would have cut but a poor figure beside his ancestor in his grip on plain fact.

Another turn of the road takes him under the brow of an overhanging group of rocks and we see a man, outlined by the moonlight, sitting on a low rock with his staff and two bags on the ground beside him; one of the half-professional beggars—decent, respectable men for the most part—who walk the roads because the wars and the growth of machinery have left them without a livelihood. John recognises him as a man born in these parts and stands beside him for a few minutes talking of wages and work and how poverty and beggary have grown in the last few years, as factories are built in the towns and the small-

holders sold out by rising prices. Robert Ashburner had been forced out of his own farm and John, who has had no evening-school lectures on economics to teach him to think of Robert as "man power" and Tom in the factory as "an operative" or to venerate the operation of the laws of supply and demand that shift the population, had teased at the problem many a night as he walked home over the hills, trying to imagine a cure for the new conditions.

"Well, John, what do men think of Napoleon's invasion here in the North?"

"In Landmere we have turned out to a man and go to drill twice in the week.¹ Some tell us it will never touch us here, and so no need to trouble—never, that is, unless he succeeds, and then what matter, for we should all go together. But we do not say that ourselves. I sometimes think we are more independent men, here in these mountains, than any in any other part of the country. What do you think, Robert, now that you see so many men of other parts?"

"I think with you. Men are free here. I think it is because they own their land instead of working for another man. Even though it is only a small holding and they are near to starving on it, as I was, they would not willingly change their poverty for wealth without it. There is something about land. It makes a man. People live together here and help each other, and yet they are free. Now, in the towns, as I have seen it, and in the mills, like those down there in Keswick, they think of the money they get, because they have no land to think of. And the work they do serves machines, not land. I have sometimes thought, John, when I have seen those great mills blazing with light, that there is the beginning of a very evil thing. And then I have turned my back and come my way up towards the hills and passed now and

¹ For Dorothy and William Wordsworth's account of the Home Guards of 1803, see *Early Letters*, 105, 151.

again a cottage with its candle set in the window and its wall set snug round the yard, as men have lived as long as we remember, and I have said to myself that it is good for us to be here. For it's not being poor that matters; it's being free. Free to walk abroad in the hills and to watch the works of the Lord. Sometimes, John, I think that is what God means for man: not that he should grow richer or live softer or have more gear and tools and cunning instruments and machines, but that he should turn his endeavour to growing in wisdom, not in wealth. Not in making many works of his own hands, but in glorying in the works of God's hands. I don't know if you take me?

"I know, Robert, I know. I have thought so myself. And the greater part of the men about here, if they could put it in words, would say as we do."¹

"I think they would. And that's what I mean when I say that it's because we are free men that we won't have Napoleon here, and his slavery, any more than we will go down to those mills of Satan below in the town and sell ourselves slaves to the machines there."

"Yes. I think you are right. A good neighbour of mine,

¹ Dorothy and William Wordsworth, if they did not often meet a man who could put it into words himself, have left many accounts of the prevalence of this feeling among the Cumberland peasants of their day. See *Journals*, November 24, 1801, and Wordsworth's letter to Charles James Fox (*Early Letters*, No. 116), where he laments the decay of the independent, small holders known as "statesmen" and speaks of the intimate relationship between freedom, comparative poverty, and the affections:

"They are small independent *proprietors* of land here called statesmen, men of respectable education who daily labour on their own little properties. The domestic affections will always be strong amongst men who live in a country not crowded with population, if these men are placed above poverty. But if they are proprietors of small estates which have descended to them from their ancestors, the power which these affections will acquire amongst such men is inconceivable by those who have only had an opportunity of observing hired labourers, farmers, and the manufacturing Poor. Their little tract of land serves as a kind of permanent rallying point for their domestic feelings, as a tablet upon which they are written, which makes them objects of memory in a thousand instances when they would otherwise be forgotten." With this we may compare the foregoing pages of the same letter and the poems *The Brothers* and *Michael* to which he himself refers.

Mr. Wordsworth (you may have heard speak of him?) said something very like it to me only the other day. He said—I remember his words because they were not what I would have thought of myself—that our mountain men had ‘an almost sublime conviction of the blessings of independent domestic life.’ It was a fine thought. I’ve pondered it many times.”

Indeed, as John Smith goes on his way and the village comes into sight below him in the moonlight, it is upon the words of his good neighbour that he is thinking. It sometimes seems to him, as he looks down on the village, in sunlight, twilight or moonlight, in its summer green or winter snow, as if he looked at a living thing, alive like a plant or a tree. He knows, as a man does who lives in an isolated but old-established community, every man and woman in it and what happened to the older of them before he was born; every child in it has grown up beside his own children. He knows every household and how they live and earn their bread and he knows those who are now under the grass beside the church where he was married, where he and his children were christened, where, please God, he in his time will be buried. And the thought comes to him sometimes that all over these mountains there are villages like each other and yet each differing from the others, like and yet unlike, as an individual man is to his neighbours. And away in other parts, on the great plains and in the south, are other villages, like and yet different again, each something without which the whole would be the poorer. And it may be, he reflects, that nations are like that, each itself, each something without which the world would be the poorer. And this Napoleon, this man who, to gratify his own power, would make them all the same, all subject to him, smudging out the life that each had to give to the world. . . . No. That must not be. The poor, decent beggar, the shepherd on the hills, they are worth more than such a man.

But John Smith is called back from his thoughts before

long by the sight of something moving up on the fell to his right. Accustomed to use his eyes in the half-light, he makes out a sheep loose some hundred yards above its fold. He knows too much about sheep-farming to try and fetch in a strange beast that will not know him and only run further afield. Better, he decides, to go round and tell Dick and let him take the dog out after it.

A muddy by-lane leads to the shepherd's cottage, and he finds the old man and his wife sitting down to their evening meal of potatoes and milk. The shepherd, just back from a day on the hills, gets up without a word and lifts down his lantern from its hook to light it at the peat fire. Then he thanks John gravely for his courtesy and, whistling to his dog, sets out again up the mountain in the sharp night air.

There is a wide difference between the attitude taken to hardship by a man of this type and a man of our own day who takes for granted our material facilities. As Dorothy Wordsworth says of a peasant neighbour, "He eats his supper, and has no luxury to look forward to but falling asleep in bed, yet I dare say he neither murmurs nor thinks it hard."¹ It is partly, as she says, because he is inured to labour; but a far greater part of the difference can be traced to a change of outlook. The average townsman of to-day has been reared in the assumption that happiness consists in comfort, that he should naturally work to procure comfort and that he has just cause for complaint if he is robbed of it. He has, did he but know it, a far more just cause for complaint in that he has been robbed, by this widespread delusion, of the resources and preoccupations which make hardship bearable.

As John goes back to the road the old shepherd's life and the beggar's wind themselves together in his mind and he begins to reflect again on the freedom and the solitude that have made them thinking men instead of slaves to machinery in the mills. Robert Ashburner had

¹ *Journals*, February 8, 1802.

spoken true when he had said that poverty of possessions was a little thing if a man possessed freedom to live and think among his own people, to hold his own beliefs, among the hills that he had known as a boy. Another familiar thought comes back to him, one that crosses his mind whenever he stands in the churchyard and reads the names on the graves, the names of men whose children or grand-children (or great-grand-children, it may be) are living now in this same dale. It seems as though what these dalesmen are has grown out of what their forebears were, that they are such men as they are because they live their lives in the same farms as their fathers before them, feeding their sheep on the same hills, going to church on Sunday in the church in which their fathers before them were christened and married and buried. There is something there that goes on. John Smith's mind moves more familiarly among facts than among abstractions from facts and he struggles with his thought, but the newspaper and second-rate books have not yet driven the living imagination out of his world.¹ He knows himself slow at working out ideas; his mind, in fact, moves in time with his slow hill-man's stride, but the ideas themselves are alive and urgent. As near as he can see it (and he stands a moment, looking down at the lights in the village below him) it is as though the past and the present and the future were one thing at root, just as the villages all over the country and the countries all over the world are, in a way, one thing. All different and yet all parts of each other. Over the wide, brown, moonlit fell the stars look down on it and him, and his heart beats faster at the thought of something that stretches forward and backward in time and out all round him in space, a kind of kinship, between all times and all places; all things being parts of one another, as the root and the bark and the pith and the twig and the leaf are all parts of the tree. And no part grows or lives without the others; a tree dies

¹ To borrow the words of W. B. Yeats: *Irish Dramatic Movement*, 96.

without its leaves as surely as without its roots. It is like a kind of communion, time and place being like the warp and the weft on a loom; it is woven out of them. Both meet together, for each man, at the time and place where he himself is.

The moon and the blue sky, the stars and the falling slopes of the fells behind him seem as though they were living beings that breathe and experience delight, and the communion seems wider even than he had thought and these, too, become a part of that great universe of thought and mind of which men often believe that they alone are conscious. As he perceives this, some verses come into his mind:

Loud is the Vale! the Voice is up
With which she speaks when storms are gone,
A mighty unison of streams!
Of all her Voices, one!

Loud is the Vale;—this inland Depth
In peace is roaring like the sea;
Yon star upon the mountain-top
Is listening quietly. . . .

What he had tried to say is contained, somehow, in those lines; the vale, the streams, the storm—and above them the star, itself a part of all this sentient universe, "listening quietly".

He delivers the parcels and the letters in his knapsack as he passes through the village and goes on to his own cottage, the last on the road.

As he turns into the yard, the light from the kitchen window falls across the cobbled stones on the peat stack and the white stone wall. His wife crosses the room to the fire carrying a kettle from the pump at the sink. He feels for the first time the chill of the outer air, as he sees the glow of fire and candle-light inside. He measures the height of the peat-stack with his eye, reckoning that he has enough cut now to carry them through the winter.

He notices a glow-worm's greenish light under the outer wall and the scent of lavender as he brushes past the bush. From behind the cottage, in the small garden walled in against the sheep, comes the song of a late thrush.

He stops in the porch to take off his heavy boots and put them under the bench, drawing out a pair of the thick home-made felt shoes commonly worn indoors. His wife comes to the door, letting out a stream of warmth and fire-light and the smell of cooking broth and potatoes. In the middle of the room the table stands ready set with plates for two on the homespun blue cloth.

"You are late, John."

"Ay. There were packets to leave that I had brought from Langmere and before that a sheep of Dick Hutchinson's astray out of the fold and before that again I met Robert Ashburner at the top of the pass."

"Well, come you in now to your supper. Robert back again in these parts? Poor soul! You should have bade him home with you, John. We could have given him his supper and he could have slept warm here by the fire for the night."

"I would have done. But he was making over towards Langmere. He will be this way next week, or may be the week after, and he'll stay a night with us then."

John goes to the bedroom to change from his working clothes into the home-spun that he wears about his cottage and croft. While Ellen fills the bowls with steaming potato broth, he pumps out clear, cold water at the sink and washes his head and hands. The touch of the cold water and the harsh towel never fail to fill him with pleasure, as they did when he was a boy.

A deep contentment falls on him when the door is shut at night and the warmth and the fire-light fill the room; it lies too deep for him to think clearly about it, even if it were his habit, which it is not, to consider his own moods; but he knows that it is compounded of feelings belonging to the present moment and those belonging to

the day that is past; things that he has seen and heard, brought into the light and comfort of this moment, throw a kind of benediction over him and over each other, like light reflected after sunset from sky to lake and from lake to sky.¹

A step sounds on the cobbles of the yard. The latch is lifted and a young man stands in the doorway, tall and strong, dressed in clumsy, homely clothes, but with an eager, able face.

"Father, Mother," he exclaims as Ellen runs to meet him, "Mr. Lewthwaite has given me a week's holiday. I have won the first Bursary at Edinburgh College."

"My son! When did you eat last? How have you come? You must have your supper at once! Sit in to the table!"

"Nay, Mother," (the young man's speech is still that of the dalesman), "Nay, I'm not starving! When Mr. Lewthwaite knew, he offered to spare me a week from the school to come over to see you and tell you. They packed me food for two days and I came over to Penrith last night and on to-day by Ullswater and Grisedale. But it's turning colder outside now, and I'll not say 'no' to a bowl of your good potato broth!"

"That is a fine start to have made in life, William," says John later, as they sit together round the fire. "I often think it's a great responsibility for a man to have a great opportunity."

¹ Again and again, in the letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth, we find references to the habits and outlook of the hillmen of the early nineteenth century that suggest a way of life full of satisfaction—sometimes conscious satisfaction—though meagre in possessions. "I have never been more delighted with the manners of any people than of the family under whose roof I am at present. They are the most honest, cleanly, sensible people I ever saw in their rank of life—and I think I may safely affirm, *happier* than anybody I know. They are contented with a supply of the bare necessities of life, are active and industrious and declare with simple frankness unmixed with ostentation that they prefer their cottage at Windy Brow to any of the showy edifices in the neighbourhood, and that they believe there is not to be found in the whole vale a happier family than they are. They are fond of reading, and reason not indifferently upon what they read" (*Early Letters*, No. 38).

"I know, Father; I know. But, please God, I shall use it."

"I think you will, my son. I have often wondered what those great colleges must be like, those towns where every man you meet going about the streets has learning and knowledge and wisdom. You'll have the chance to learn much besides doctoring there. There'll be men there, I take it, who will know foreign tongues and the languages the scriptures were written in and how men lived in those days and how they live in strange countries to-day."

"There will, Father, I doubt not. There will be all the learning of the world there, I think. And especially for medicine. Mr. Lewthwaite says 'tis the finest place in the world for a man to go to learn medicine and doctoring. Think of that, Father!"

"Ay, my son, you've done well and we're proud people to-night, your mother and I."

"Ah, no, Father. It was you first made me want learning and understanding. From the days when you used to walk over the hills with me to school, before I could go alone. We were always wondering how things came to be as they were and why, and the nature of things. Do you remember?"

"I do. Do you think, William—it comes into my mind sometimes to wonder—do you ever think there is a difference between learning and understanding?"

"Ah, Father, that is the very question I have asked myself! I think there is a difference."

"Ay?"

"I think a man can have learning, almost as he could have any other possession, money, or the ability to handle machines, and he can have it with or without understanding? Do you take me?"

"Ay."

"But understanding is a way of looking at everything. It is what Solomon prayed for and—you remember?—all

the rest was added because of it. It is such that I would have, and that you would have, Father. And I sometimes think if you or I owned some of these new machines that are growing up everywhere, that we would do something different with them, because we should want understanding of the whole world and of their place in it, not just what I would call 'learning' enough to be able to use them and make money by them. I think of the machines because they are something new that we have discovered in our time and because they are like medicine in this, that medicine too is partly the art of discovering. Only, I think, after men have discovered a thing there are yet two different ways they can take; they can seek to use it only for profit and convenience, without thought of what it means, or they can try to understand its meaning and how it may alter the world. Its hard to say what I mean, but it gets clearer day by day."

"It is strange you should say that, William. I met old Robert Ashburner coming over the hill to-day—you remember him?—and he was speaking of the same thing. He said that, to his way of thinking, the machines and the mills were the beginning of a very evil thing."

"I think 'tis not the machines and the mills that are evil things themselves, Father. But it is what men will use them for and what they will do to men that will be either a great evil or a great good. I think when men use anything amiss they become evil themselves. That was maybe what Robert Ashburner had in his mind."

"Ay. We have need of great wisdom in these days, if the world after us is not to be the worse for the choice we make."

"It is what you said just now, Father. Men have a great responsibility when they have a great opportunity. Please God we shall so use it that men looking back to these days shall not rise up and call us accursed. For we must use it. We have it now and we cannot unmake it again. It is like a wind to a sailor, we must work with

it, not fight it. We must work with it, to the greater glory of God."

"I know. 'Let your light so shine before men that they glorify your Father, which is in Heaven'."

Late that night John is still awake. There is very little light in the room under its low ceiling but through the open window in front of him he can watch the moonlight resting on one high peak that rises behind the fells. Through his mind run again the things he has heard and seen and thought during the day, the people he has spoken with and the understanding, the tenderness that are inseparable parts of their lives. It seems as though these things are the roots of whatever wisdom men achieve and whatever is empty of these had no enduring power. Without these, Satanic energy itself could create only a burden of knowledge, skill or power, a weariness to the spirit and a deception to the mind. In love only, towards man, towards nature, towards the things and creatures about him, is life. Dimly at the back of his mind, as he falls asleep, there forms the thought: "God so loveth the world."

John Smith may seem at first glance an idealised character, but there is abundant evidence that such men were easily to be found in his day and in that country. Moreover, we may as well admit frankly that he starts with an immense advantage over most of us. By the great good fortune of his natural and spiritual surroundings, he is nearer to the indwelling reality in men and nature than the townsman of to-day can ever be without a fight (which may sometimes be a fierce one) against the enervation on the one hand and the distraction on the other that invade him from the world about him. Wordsworth himself, in the letter to Charles Fox already quoted, and in many other places, laments the passing of this order of life and forecasts accurately enough some of these psychological and moral consequences of its passing which

are now deep in our daily habits. But he could not foresee the recent and more contagious forms which the malady has taken, not only attacking the organism of society and replacing, as he feared, natural growths by an institutionalism often alien to men's soundest instincts, but also taking from the individual thus rendered spiritually rootless, the need to establish free, self-reliant relations with his material environment. From the loss of this alert, open-minded independence has followed in turn that loss of speculation and enquiry which is so common among us to-day, and, thereby, the atrophy of intellectual and imaginative life.

Let us now look at an extreme instance of the opposite kind—as John Smith was in some degree an extreme instance of *his* kind—and imagine a man of our own day nurtured in mechanisation and reared in those habits of mind which the unthinking acceptance of mechanisation have produced. We will, as I say, choose deliberately an extreme case, a man who has been exposed to the worst of these influences and has made no effort to rebel against them. A man, in fact, for whom our own continued acquiescence in these things has combined with his mental indolence to drive “the living imagination out of the world”.

2

We may perhaps most suitably meet Mr. Algernon Smith (of Smith, Brown and Smith, stockbrokers) in a tube train in London one fine Saturday afternoon in the early nineteen-thirties. We shall probably find ourselves sitting opposite to him.

There is little that is likely to attract any other human being to Mr. Algernon Smith; one's first impression is that he is brisk and bead-like. His eyes are bright and round, like dark glass marbles; they flick from object to object with hard, quick appraisal, tossing each, as it were, into

one of a few clear, pre-arranged categories, like a man grading a picking of apples by hand at top speed. His face bears an astonishing resemblance to that of a bad-tempered Pekinese pug. He is not, as it happens, specially annoyed at this moment, because the succession of whiskies necessary to clinch a deal in the City still have a mellowing influence. The irritation, therefore, with which he plumps down on to the springy seat in the tube train and shakes open the late special of the *Evening Yell* is probably habitual. One finds oneself watching him speculatively as he takes off his hat and slaps it down on the seat beside him, takes his cigar out of his mouth, twiddles it between his fingers and thumb, eyes it vindictively and re-inserts it. When he goes back to the *Evening Yell*, we speculate on what goes on in his head as he reads. Very little strikes him as worth looking at, I suspect; there is nothing there about prices. He seems to be picking out the few items that have any interest for him; a £50,000 pearl necklace stolen from a celebrated actress in a Turkish bath; a dismembered body, disguised as salmon in straw wrappings, posted from various addresses in the Highlands to respectable Members of Parliament; a lawsuit; a divorce. . . . Hullo, though! He looks more interested now. What is it? Can it be the headline, "Half a million feared drowned in China"? . . . He seems to have subsided into surly relief again; possibly his shares are in quite a different part of the country. A great relief, that must be. Markets are rotten enough already. And to judge by Mr. Smith's face, or as much of it as is visible, he is now thinking of the two firms that were hammered this week and reflecting that Smith, Brown and Smith are not too sure on their feet either. But I expect he has seen ahead and the bulk of his property will be safe by now, turned into gilt-edged securities. Probably his house is paid for, too. As he smacks the *Evening Yell* open again one has the impression that he is reminding himself that he will be all right even if the crash comes.

The train is slowing down now; it is the end of the journey. He claps on his hat, tosses the *Yell* on to the next seat and bounces out on to the platform before any of the rest of us are through the door. We catch a glimpse of him glancing up and down the road as he waits for his car to draw in to the station approach, and appraising the row of glittering plate-glass shop-fronts. A good place to have chosen, he seems to think. Money moving into it steadily. The smartening up of all those shops shows it already. Always a good sign. Glib and Glib, now, since they built that new frontage, look quite a live concern. That was a good idea, too, taking their shares when they were only just beginning to go ahead. About time to sell again now, perhaps? Just about reaching their peak. And with these trade-slumps setting in everywhere, it's best to get everything into gilt-edged as soon as possible. Make a memo for that on Monday morning. . . .

His speculations, or, rather, our reconstruction of them, are now broken off, as his car draws up in front of him. He gets in and is driven smoothly away in the direction of the smart residential suburb two miles out, disappearing quickly from our sight, but less quickly from our minds. In fact, we know him so well by now that our imaginations follow him home quite easily and as we make our own way on foot or by bus, we see him marching up the flagged approach to Blenheim Villa, between the double rows of symmetrical asters, and letting himself in with his latchkey. He hangs up his shiny tall hat on a shiny mahogany hat-stand and goes into the white tiled cloak-room in the lobby. In about two seconds he bounces out again.

"Maria!" he shouts, "Maria! What the hell has happened to the electric light in the cloak-room? It won't light!"

His wife comes out of the drawing-room, a stout woman expensively dressed, be-jewelled and powdered, with a permanently aggrieved expression.

"Don't make such a noise, Algernon; the servants will hear you. I don't know what's the matter with the light. It was all right this morning."

"Well, it isn't now. I pay enough to keep this house up, don't I? And I expect to find it properly looked after. Whatever will the Robinsons think when they come?—No light in the downstairs cloak-room! I don't like the idea of their seeing anything that's not just so. Ring up the electricians and have a man sent round at once to see what's wrong." And he marches upstairs to wash in one of the bathrooms.

It is often distasteful and sometimes almost intolerable to make one's way home in a crowded omnibus after a hard day's work, but meeting Mr. Algernon Smith has a little sobered our irritation to-day. For what is uppermost in our minds, and most disturbing, as we find a convenient end of strap to hold on to, is the question: What has happened to him? Why? Who is responsible? He did not give the impression of a personality strong enough to seek out evil and ensue it; nothing indeed could be further from our picture of him than diabolic and magnificent sin. He suggests rather something naturally acquiescent that has been as completely conditioned by its surroundings as the subject of a laboratory experiment. He seems to have assimilated, without criticism or rebellion, whatever events or circumstances offered to him—and, even so, to have had uncommonly bad luck with event and circumstance. He seems also, if we may guess a little further, to have squared his conduct all through his life with the opinions on work, social relations and money propagated by the popular press, popular art and popular political and economic policy. The responsibility, in other words, would seem to be neatly divided between Mr. Smith's passive inertia and our own contribution to these influences. On the one hand there is his own indolence, that refuses to exercise the higher faculties of the mind and selects, from what it finds, the convenient

and the universally acceptable. On the other is a vast, haphazard association of influences resulting from our acquiescence in the diversion of our mechanical facilities to the function of choking, enslaving or putting to sleep the intellect and the imagination.

With growing despondency we return to our reconstruction of the home life of Algernon Smith. It may throw some light on the causes of his condition.

When he has washed and dressed we shall probably find that he comes downstairs again, to wait for his dinner guests in what, for some obscure reason, is known as "the library". There will, I fancy, be no books in it, but several leather arm-chairs and a large desk that is never used. Indeed, the room as a whole is never used, except for Mr. Smith to sit in on those rare occasions when he is at home for an hour or so in the evening; he feels that the ownership of such a room keeps up appearances. We watch him ring for whisky and soda, switch on the electric heater, light another cigar and turn on the large and expensive wireless set. It is probably tuned in to a London programme and the unmistakeable opening chords of a famous concerto fill the room.

"Oh, hell!" exclaims Mr. Smith, and switches off again. "All this damned music and stuff! Why can't they give us something worth listening to?"

He tries another wave-length and gets three sentences from a lecture on excavations in Mesopotamia.

There is nothing for it but the *Radio Times*. If he runs his eye over the different programmes offered for that hour he will be eventually appeased by a music-hall selection from some seaside town. He can tune in on that and settle down to suck at his cigar with a few indignant comments on the B.B.C. programmes, until a tinny-voiced soprano singing a comic song soothes him into relative complacence. The range of this particular set is such that he could pick up with ease a transmission from any station nearer than New York. But unfortunately Mr.

Smith knows no foreign languages; curiosity was suffocated in him long ago by the insistent pressure of advertisements and the propinquity of the facilities they offered; he has therefore never travelled further than Paris, believing that you can get what you want better at home. Equally unfortunately, for similar reasons, he does not care for music. So the product of a generation of research in wireless telegraphy cannot, obviously, benefit him much.

It begins to look as though dinner in the Smith household will begin inauspiciously. The income of the Robinsons, who arrive in a grey and silver car, may or may not be slightly more than the Smiths' (it is a matter of keen conjecture on both sides), but it is of great importance that each family should impress the other. It is a pity, therefore, that the nondescript soup, though ostentatiously served, is lukewarm, and that there should be a long delay between it and the sardine on a strip of greasy toast that impersonates an entrée.

Seven pallid courses follow each other in pomp, accompanied by a hock and a burgundy recommended to Mr. Smith by a friend in the City and far too good for the food or the company. Mr. Smith's comments on the food are uncomplimentary and only restrained within the limits of convention by the acid frigidity of his wife's bearing. He probably foresees already that there will be a row afterwards, but reflects defiantly that he has a thing or two to say himself. Maria must know by now that if you entertain people who may be useful in business, you want the thing done in style. Something with a flourish to it. Oh, of course, she'll start whining about the servants again. But he is not going to stand that. He is handing over enough every week, in all conscience, to keep the house running—a damned expensive outfit too—and it is her business to see that it runs. In the world of Algernon Smith servants are elaborate slot machines. You put in money and you take out work. Simple

enough, surely? The tram-lines on which his own life runs give him hardly a chance of any other view.

The evening ends, on the whole, even less auspiciously than it had begun.

Mr. Smith takes a final whisky and soda in the library before "turning in". For lack of anything to think about, his eye falls with disfavour upon the electric heater. Getting a bit old-fashioned, isn't it? Not the most up-to-date model. Damn it all, why couldn't Maria keep an eye on things like that! She ought to arrange to have it changed for something a bit smarter.

Mr. Smith "turns in".

From what we already know about the unhappy world of Algernon Smith, we can reconstruct his Sunday with grim and miserable certainty. He takes his breakfast in bed on Sunday mornings at a late hour, but, late as it is, the illustrated Sunday paper is not on his breakfast tray. He rings the bell angrily as soon as he notices this and is not appeased by the servant's explanation that there has been "some sort of a break-down on the tube train" and none of the papers have reached the newsagent yet. The door closes again behind her.

"Rot!" he mutters as he plasters the mustard on a mouthful of sausage. "What's the use of them saying that? It's their business to see the papers get here. And anyway, what do they mean by a 'break-down'. No excuse for it. It's their job to see that the damn thing works. Always something going wrong. I'm sick of it."

Modern mechanisation and his own submission to its surface implications have already reduced his world to that inferno of insipidity in which a man neither knows nor cares *how* anything works. If you cannot mend your own electric light fuse which you can see, how shall you understand the intricacies of national transport which you cannot see?

He leans out of bed and turns on the wireless; the concluding portions of a church service fill the room. By the time he has replaced it with some dance music from a continental station, his temper is growing dangerous. Fortunately the dance music is shrill, lively and prolonged; he can leave the door into his bathroom open and listen to it while he baths and shaves.

It is a warm, sunny morning, so he can set up a deck-chair in the garden and light a cigar. The papers have probably come now and in the intervals of working out a football pool he can throw a critical eye over the shaven lawn and the symmetrical beds of dahlias to see whether the gardener is keeping up to the mark. He is the kind of man who hates a garden to look "all over the place". Neat and bright; the sort of place where you expect to see a smart-looking deck-chair or two and perhaps a well-painted summer-house—in these respects his own garden comes as near as anything could to giving him satisfaction.

It is growing hot for a September morning and he dozes off in the intervals of plotting out his football pools and exchanging a few words over the privet hedge with Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones is inclined to be wider awake and in that respect a nuisance. The conversation, however, is brief and mainly political, confining itself to agreement in a few sentiments such as "shoot the lot!"

An impressive and widely audible booming from within announces that the Smiths are about to dine.

On Sundays, when there are no guests and consequently only a minimum of appearances to be preserved, Mr. Smith insists on a good mid-day dinner, the kind he can enjoy. The result on this particular September afternoon is a well-composed meal of fried pork chops and roast potatoes, followed by steamed treacle pudding and gorgonzola cheese, the whole washed down with bottled beer. Mrs. Smith eats sparingly, her manner hinting outraged refinement. Mr. Smith does not.

After dinner, as is his habit on Sunday, he goes to sleep in the library and, unaccountably, awakes with an impression of having swallowed several paving-stones. In gloomy wrath he goes upstairs to his bathroom, wrenches open the door of the white, hygienic medicine chest and runs his eye over the rows of patent medicines on the shelves. What he never has been able to understand, he reflects, is why the hell the people who are paid to cook food can't do it properly so that you don't get indigestion; or, alternatively, why all those fools who are supposed to know about medicines can't invent something you can rely on to put it right. The heir to the scientific discoveries of three centuries unfortunately knows less about elementary dietetics than an Elizabethan grandmother in her herb garden, and it has never occurred to him to read the textbooks on physiology and pharmacology familiar to every medical student of his own day. He chooses what appears to be the most promising specific and takes a large dose. His temper, when the family assembles for tea some half-hour later, is by no means good.

I fancy that the drawing-room of the Smith household will be hot and stuffy and will smell of upholstery, for the sun has been pouring in all day through shut windows. Mr. Smith's head will ache more violently than ever, but he will never trace the discomfort to its cause. He sits in the largest arm-chair and gulps down a cup of strong tea in angry silence.

The door bursts open and a neutral-coloured and unprepossessing young man slouches in and slumps into the second largest arm-chair. He is followed almost at once by a languid, insolent young woman with the bloody lips and talons of a harpy and a dishevelled head of greasily looped curls.

The younger generation of Smiths fall to sparring, with indolent peevishness. They are, after all, the heirs to all their father's dreary materialism and to the restlessness of their own generation into the bargain.

"You might get out of that chair, Sidney, and let me have it. It's the only decent one in the room."

"You've got a hope, haven't you?" (he is busy stuffing cream cake into his mouth).

"Well, Dad, shouldn't he give me it? Why should he——"

"Now you just damn well stop quarrelling, you kids! My head aches."

"Leave your brother alone, Mildred, he's tired." Mrs. Smith, sitting very erect behind her silver tea-tray, fights, as usual, a losing battle on behalf of elegance and refinement, while her family sprawls around her in surly discontent.

"Dad!" Sidney looks up in the interval between two slices of cake.

"Uh?"

"Look here, Dad, when can I have that new motor-bike?"

"New motor-bike? What the hell do you mean about a new motor-bike? You've got one already."

"Aw, Dad, it's out of date. Look here, it's the year before last's model. I can't go about on it much longer. It's got no speed."

"It's got quite enough speed, Sidney. I don't like the idea of you tearing about at those awful rates. I've been worrying about you all the afternoon, knowing you were out on it."

"Aw, Mother, don't *you* start interfering, for heaven's sake. You don't know anything about it. Nothing's going to happen to me. No, but I say, Dad, it's an awful old thing, honest."

"I've said you won't have another and you won't have. That's enough. Now shut up. I've enough to worry me, in all conscience. Take a gold-mine to keep this family going! New motor-bike, indeed!"

"All right, Dad. Only . . . Ted Robinson's new one—you know it—he did eighty this afternoon. That's a real, fine machine, that is."

"Young Robinson? When d'he get a new bike?"

"His dad gave it him last week. Said the old one didn't look a good enough turn-out for Ted. Nor it didn't either. It was worse than mine."

"Uh."

"Well, Dad; you will see soon, won't you? I just hate having to go out with Ted on this old thing. I tell you, he leaves me behind on every straight stretch."

"Uh. Well, don't worry me now. We'll see."

"All right, Dad. Only soon, eh?"

"Now leave your father alone, Sidney. You heard what he said."

"Oh, all right, Mother. Well, I'm going out again." Algernon sinks into an uneasy dose and the younger generation take up their quarrel in an undertone.

"You are a mean beast, Sidney."

"Why, whatever for?"

"Butting in like that about your damned motor-bike. You knew I wanted to get the money out of him for that cruise to Jamaica and now I never will. As if you couldn't have done with the old one for a bit longer and given me a chance!"

"Much chance you need! What d'you want to go to Jamaica for anyway? Only to have an excuse for buying a whole new set of clothes and getting off with another dago on the boat."

"Of course I want to go to Jamaica! Why, the Robinsons have gone on a cruise every year as long as Ethel can remember. And I've only been on two. Of course——"

"Quite enough, too. Gosh! Last time, when you went to Italy, you didn't know the names of any of the towns you'd stopped at! Can't see why you can't have that kind of cruise on Brighton beach."

"Sidney, you're a beast! You're——"

"Oh, children, stop *quarrelling*! You'll only make your father angrier than ever and then you'll neither of you get anything. I can't see how you can both be so silly."

Mrs. Smith's cynicism is so naïve as to be disarming. Perhaps her life as a housekeeper, by removing some illusions as to the nature of mechanical facilities, has removed at the same time the last illusion about human motives.

Much as we should like to do so, we had better pause before we condemn the younger generation of the Smith family out of hand. A tragic, half-obliterated desire for action is at work in both of them. But facilities that they have taken for granted and the habit of expecting things to come their way without thought or effort have blunted their imaginations. Instead of actively responding to the world about them, they are fast becoming mere passive recipients of sensations and their ability to be stimulated even by those is growing less and less. When we return to the drawing-room, Sidney is on his way out, slamming the door behind him.

"Well, aren't we going to *do* anything this evening?" Mildred begins as soon as he is gone. "There's nothing to do, ever, in this place. I don't want to just sit round doing nothing. I'll just go dotty. Dad?"

"Uh?"

"Well, can't we *do* something? Can't we all go to a picture or something? I am just sick of never having any fun. Sidney goes off on his motor-bike and enjoys himself and I never get anything." She helps herself to a third cream cake, but decides after the first mouthful that she does not really want it, and puts it down again.

"Oh, all right." We sympathise with Mr. Smith. Certainly, even a "picture" is better than the prospect of an evening spent with his family. "What's on at the Superbia?"

"Oh, not the Superbia, Dad! That's some awful thing about Central Africa. All photographs of natives and animals. There's a lovely film at the Magnificent, *Lustrous Love*. Ethel Robinson says it's gorgeous!"

"Uh. Doesn't sound much to me. But the Magnificent's

a fine house, all right." He reaches over and lifts the portable telephone towards him and enters into irritable negotiations with the box-office for the most expensive seats.

Perhaps we may be allowed, in the language of the B.B.C., to fade out the Smith family now? I for one have had enough of them, and I think my readers have. But is it altogether their fault that the "blessings of independent domestic life", that Wordsworth observed in their ancestors of over a hundred years ago, have turned, for the Smith's of our own day, into so arid a Dead Sea fruit? What proportion of it, after all, must be put to the account of our own acquiescence in unimaginative living, and all that follows from it? I would suggest, after the manner of a competition page in a children's magazine, that we might, in an idle moment, list the number of facilities, privileges and resources of modern invention that the Smith family have between them used and abused. It is a long list and embraces a good many aspects of everyday life in a mechanised civilisation.

One thing is certain; something is wrong. This would, I think, have been clear even if we had not put the picture of Mr. Algernon Smith side by side with that of his predecessor. But when we look at them alternately comment is almost needless.

Nevertheless, there are one or two precautions to be kept in mind. We shall be wrong if we trace this difference solely to the spread of mechanised civilisation. It may seem at first as though this new factor in human experience had given an inevitable downward drive to the human spirit; that the activities of man's mind must themselves become mechanised in response and that the machines he once designed will now design him. But this is not an inevitable result of mechanisation, but, rather, of the failure of man's spirit to maintain towards the "machines" an attitude of wonder, of delight, of reverence

which, within their sphere, is due to them. It is, I grant, harder for a modern man to feel thus towards machines than for a ploughman to look in this way at the fields, hedges and sky that surround him, because, when all is said, the machines themselves are not always noble or exquisite and sometimes produce at best only broken wonder and delight. But this is only to say that the danger of letting the imagination flag is a good deal greater when we are surrounded by mechanisation than under almost any other conditions. One kind of product of complete inertia in this sphere and in these conditions is, I think, represented by Mr. Algernon Smith; but even the man of resolute spirit will find it hard sometimes to retain the mood of wonder and of delight in the conditions forced upon the dwellers in the suburbs of our big cities to-day. Few of us can have watched without misgivings the agglomeration of the last twenty years, the social elephantiasis made possible by the facilities of transport and mechanised life. But the way to repair the disaster does not lie through the policy of Erewhon; the problems we have raised will not be solved by passing Acts of Parliament forbidding the use of machines. We shall not cause Mr. Algernon Smith to be born again as John Smith by the naïve device of removing his wireless set, his electric heater, his mechanical transport, the essential services of his suburban area and all the rest of the apparatus that he takes for granted. We shall not, that is to say, serve any good purpose by insisting that before we tackle our problem we must have some of its essential features modified. Here is our problem, an unwieldy embarrassment of devices, facilities and resources that should have set man free from toil and starvation and that appear instead to have laid upon him a burden of dead matter which has enslaved, not liberated, his spirit.

What can be done with this state of affairs?

Bearing in mind the conviction with which we set out, that the solution lies in the conduct of the individual mind,

in what it does rather than in what befalls it, we might perhaps experiment a little further in two directions. We might attempt to set the mind of Algernon Smith (or of Algernon Smith at a slightly earlier age) in an environment as favourable as possible to the growth of imaginative thought and experience and as discouraging as possible to his peculiar vices. And we might try to discover somewhere in the population of our modern cities and suburbs a man who has to some extent, perhaps unconsciously, found a way through the difficulties for himself. Let us take the first of these possibilities first.

It is doubtful whether any treatment could do much with Mr. Algernon Smith as he now stands or even, perhaps, as he was some ten years earlier. The forces of big-town life in north-west Europe in the twentieth century have done too much with him already. Reared in the conventions of a small suburb, educated in one of the characteristic factories erected by the lower middle class for that purpose, put, at a still tender age, into a money-making factory of a slightly different kind in a slightly different part of the metropolis, and supplied with every possible opportunity of avoiding reflection, he is one of those products which lead sensitive men into the blasphemy of defending battle, murder and violent death, if these will penetrate to the core of imaginative life beneath such atrophy of personality. But may we consider whether some treatment less extreme than this would ever have penetrated a part of that calloused surface, and, if so, how, and how far? Can we, that is, imagine a process with which to experiment, and will the experiment, as we go on with it, tell us anything more about the nature of the problem we are studying?

Suppose we try to lift Algernon Smith out of his setting into surroundings and conditions as near as possible to those of John Smith. As we cannot set the clock back, we could only reproduce these conditions by setting up an experimental station on a large and costly scale in a

remote area in Canada or New Zealand. And I am not sure that our findings would be likely to justify that. But we can produce some of the physical conditions far more simply and nearer home and so allow him the opportunity to produce for himself some of the inner experience. (This, however, we gloomily anticipate, he will not do.)

Something as simple as a small summer camp in a mountainous area would allow us to make the experiment. We shall, of course, have to use some coercion; we can hardly expect him to co-operate voluntarily, at any rate at the beginning. It would be well to choose a quiet, secluded spot in the Central Highlands. Towards the middle of the Cairn Gorm mountains there are one or two pleasant, empty places about fifteen miles in every direction from the nearest habitation. Any one of these will allow us to reproduce some of the conditions we want. We shall approach it on mountain ponies, for obviously we cannot expect Mr. Smith to walk fifteen miles. Let us suppose this done, the preliminaries over and our experiment about to begin.

He is confronted with a fine, open plateau surrounded by the peaks of the high Cairn Gorms and by the winds which blow from and between them. A noble and historic stream has its springs close at hand. Provisions and equipment have been brought up on other ponies and a couple of female goats (in milk) have accompanied us. We will send the ponies back in charge of the gillie (to prevent any interruption of the experiment by the escape of the victim), and then there will be nothing left for Mr. Smith to do but settle in. We shall certainly have to help him, as we do not want him to die of exposure before the experiment has begun.

He has lived all his life in houses built, he has not the remotest notion how, by builders who are to him only an address in a telephone book and a board hung outside a garden gate. At an earlier stage the site for the house had been chosen (we will hope with the exercise of some

intelligence, but this is not certain) by the representatives of the firm or association who were later to sell it to him. If by some regrettable oversight they chose a piece of land containing an undetected spring so that the walls continued to sweat, or blue clay so that they cracked and bulged, he will of course have got out of it—or to be accurate, his solicitors will have got him out of it—and have moved into another. But I think Mr. Smith has always been too shrewd a man to have been trapped into this experience. He will have employed his solicitors at the beginning to see that all is in order. In any case, the site will not have meant anything real to him. Now, unfortunately, he is confronted with a "site" and little more. Actually we have dealt very considerately with him. We have led him to level ground and running water. But we cannot expect him to appreciate this. He has to put a tent up.

We will skip the stages by which he learns to adjust tent-pegs: these are always painful in a novice. I am prepared to take a fairly substantial bet that his first choice is a patch of bog which slowly seeps through the ground-sheet. Bog is, as a rule, delightfully level, and the nature of the subsoil, and how to judge it by the herbage, and of the drainage, and how to judge it by the elevation of the chosen patch in relation to the ground just above and just below it, are things not yet within his grasp. But they will be. Though I am afraid we should have to give him some one else's tent for several nights in succession if we insisted on his working it out entirely by trial and error. You see, a "site" has never been anything to him before but a word that goes along with "message" in a lawyer's deed. By the time he has learnt what is and what is not a bog he has probably travelled half round the plateau, slowly transforming the dead word "site" into a living fact. By then we shall, I expect, be due for a day of highland wind and rain and we shall find that he has arranged his tent with the gate

facing the direction from which the prevailing winds of that district have been blowing since the Day of Creation. Any one who was used to mountain camping could have told him, in a dead calm, what this direction was likely to be, even if he or she had never seen the place before; certainly with the help of a map this could have been done. Still, it is a relatively small thing to take the tent right down again and set it up facing the opposite way. (Surely he must by now know how to do this?) And we can soon congratulate ourselves on having him sitting fairly snug in a position that he can probably maintain for some weeks.

Moreover, we have now taken some steps in the direction of our real object. Mr. Smith now realises, more vividly than he has ever realised anything in his life, that before he could even open his garden gate on returning from the City, a certain amount of common sense thinking had to be done on his behalf by men who worked with practical and elementary facts and had made it their business to understand where a dwelling could and where it could not be erected. He has also, on the way, learnt something about the elementary principles of architecture, at least, of the primitive kind of architecture that confines itself to walls and a roof. He knows from damp experience that you can only make them rainproof by finding out something about the materials you are using and the conditions under which those materials will resist weather; he no longer arranges his pegs and guy ropes so that there is a sag in the middle of the tent or so that the fly-sheet touches the peak. And as often as he can remember he refrains from pressing his head or his body against wet cotton walls or roof that were, up to then, effectually sluicing off the rain.

Mr. Smith has had a trying day. I think we had better let him go to bed. Now what, up to now, does "go to bed" connote for him? It has meant going upstairs, undressing by the electric fire in his bedroom, going into a

well-fitted bathroom and lavatory where, surrounded by the sanitary appliances of modern plumbing and supplied with hot water by the central heating system, well illuminated by electric light that he switches on as he enters, he can attend comfortably to his various needs down to the placing of his false teeth in a clean glass of Dettol. All these things have been supplied for him by men about whose crafts he cares nothing: he has never thought of the things themselves except as the mechanical results of pressing a switch, turning a tap or pulling a plug, and, of course, of writing a cheque.

Far other is the scene in the Central Highlands.

Night is beginning to fall. If we are tempering education with mercy we may suggest to him that it is advisable to light a candle in his tent *before* it gets too dark to find his matches. But I am afraid that, unless we show him where to put it and how to shield it, we shall soon have the tent on fire or the candle blown out. We must try to remember that "light" for him is still only a switch on the right-hand side of the door as you come into a room. When it "goes wrong", you "ring up" a man called an electrician, or your wife does. Subsequently, of course, you write a cheque.

His lavatory is a small clump of stunted birch trees a hundred yards from the tent. On his way there in the half light he must try to skirt the patches of bog and not to take a toss over a tussock of heather. It will be pretty damp in the undergrowth under the birch trees, even if it isn't actually raining at the time, which it probably is. These natural lavatories have their complicating features.

I do not suppose Mr. Smith will want to wash much. He will certainly have realised by now that the word "bath" has temporarily left his vocabulary and his life. But we can lead him to the nearest of the Pools of Dee and give him a cake of soap and a towel and leave him there. He is a lucky man, if he only knew it; if we had taken him camping in the Essex saltings the soap would not have

lathered, but the water of the Pools of Dee is exquisitely soft. (It also happens to have an average temperature below anything one would have thought possible in water that was still liquid.)

Arranging his sleeping-sack ought not to be difficult. I have never met a human being who did not see fairly soon which end of a sleeping-sack to get into. But he will probably want his customary glass of hot whisky and water. We have no real objection to his having it if he wants it. As for the water, he has only to fetch some in a saucepan from the Pools of Dee, light his Primus stove in a safe and sheltered place inside his tent, wait for it to heat up, fill up his glass and put out the stove. If he cannot light the Primus stove—and he will not be the first person who has found a little difficulty over this in a windy tent on a wet night—we must explain to him how much harder it would have been to light a fire of sticks in the shelter of a rock, and leave him without his hot water. But when it come to the whisky, we can do very little. Perhaps, after all, we ought to have taken him to the Wicklow Hills? There, at the cost of a two-mile stroll across country in the dark, he might have got into contact with a man who knew some one who sold poteen. I do not believe this to be possible in the Highlands. . . . At least, we have the satisfaction of knowing that he now realises some of the elementary facts that underlie the preparing of hot whisky and water. By morning he will know some of the equally elementary facts that underlie a bed.

And so it goes on. Breakfast will be the next focus of interest, I think.

He probably will not care for his tea very much because we shall not have brought a teapot, but we will tell him how much worse it would have been in the high Alps where the low pressure allows the water to boil at too low a temperature to infuse the tea-leaves properly. That should comfort him. He will probably want some milk

with it. The milk is there all right: we have foreseen that. Goat's milk, it is true, is not at its best in tea, quite apart from the minor difficulty of extracting it from the goat. But what would have been the use of bringing a cow? She would never have got up the pass, in the first place, and would probably have died of pneumonia in the night if we had tethered her up here at the top of it. (We brought a few tins of Nestle's excellent condensed milk, it is true, but we are holding them in reserve in case Mr. Smith's education takes longer than we supposed and the goats run dry.)

I think we had better lower the curtain on Mr. Smith milking the goat. His breakfast is yet a great way off.

After a time the paraffin will run out; the stoves, after all, were only a concession to the habits of mechanised civilisation. Then he will have to depend upon finding dry kindling, storing it and keeping it dry and lighting a fire with it. This, especially the keeping it dry, almost amounts to a craft, in the average Highland summer. But we will keep him supplied with matches; probably none of the rest of us are capable of making a fire without them, either.

The time will come when we may well consider taking Mr. Smith back to London again. I think, whatever we have done to his habits, we shall not have fully transformed his mind; the quality essential to that transformation would, if it had still been alive in him, have operated, long before we ever met him, to make him a very different creature from the man we have been considering. His mind, as we know it, has probably been deteriorating steadily all his life, from the habit of manipulating forces that he does not understand or reverence, forces from which he would shrink in terror if other men, bolder and more imaginative than he, had not harnessed and regulated them for his unworthy use. But if the power to wonder and the desire to understand had been suffered to grow in him, and by growing, to illuminate the world

on which he looked out, he would probably have resembled much more nearly that third figure which we hope presently to discover and he would already have effected the transmutation for himself. Much more than our experiment has done or could do will be needed to cure the confirmed habit of imaginative inertia. But in admitting this we admit that the experiment has taught us more about that disease.

In sober fact, I do not think we should ever take Mr. Smith back to London, unless he had expressed a strong desire to have his body conveyed there rather than buried in Aberdeen. But if, by some unsuspected power of physical adaptability, he survived the shock to his habits and outlook, it would be interesting to see precisely what kind of difference our experiment had made to him. We have, at the cost of time, energy and suffering, succeeded in forcing upon his attention some of the simple facts that underlie the services, facilities and resources that he has taken for granted all his life; a few of the things that go to the making of shelter, fire, light, cooked food and the elements of daily life. I do not suggest that he has worked out for himself yet the steps that lead from a fire of sticks to his electric heater and central heating plant, but I think he is beginning to see dimly that the fire of sticks and the electric heater are terms at the opposite ends of a sequence; that, before electric heaters were, was the fire of sticks, and that if anything should occur to upset the delicate mechanisation of our civic life, as, for instance, happens when a bomb falls on the local power station, there would have to be the fire of sticks again—if we were lucky enough to get it. In the same way, he has probably learnt a few simple realities about transport and the transmission of news; enough to make him look more thoughtfully at a tube train, a newspaper and a wireless set when he sees them again. But I am afraid there are only two possible ways in which Mr. Smith is likely to respond. If we have simply frightened him, he will go

back to his mechanised life with a terrified determination never to risk being parted from it again (though even here there will have been some gain, some growth of awe and respect). Or, if he is of tougher stuff, he will refuse ever to come within reach of his former life again, having acquired the opposite kind of terror, the terror of undue dependence upon material and mechanised civilisation. This has led in our day to many forms of reaction. I think it is a less parlous state of mind than the other, for it is well to make sure from time to time that our primitive capacities are not utterly lost. But it still does not solve the problem of using the modern world aright, which becomes more and more the crux of our conflict. In the case of our synthetic figure, which we have used as a specimen for a laboratory experiment, we realise that we are only half way through our task. We have made him aware of the nature of some of the things that surround him. We have shown him, perhaps, that the mechanised world in which he has lived like an automaton is only a vast superstructure, raised by ingenuity and dependent upon intricate organisation, and not a natural and inevitable product. We may perhaps have helped him towards his first, crude intimations of this truth by pointing the contrast between his customary, artificial living conditions and those that are a little nearer to the unassisted nature of things. But we shall probably find that we have left him a long way from appreciating the relation of the one to the other and in a state of revolt against either the artificial or the primitive. The one thing needful lies still far ahead; the understanding mastery of the nature and problems of the civilisation in which he is living depends not merely upon perceiving the complexities of mechanised life, but upon an attitude of mind undaunted by their supremacy and unsubdued by their seduction. We have perhaps done all that we could do by demonstration and the impact of event; the one thing needful that will give him this mastery must be done by the man himself in his

own mind. Just as the deterioration of his mind has been the result of lifelong mental indolence, so the power to live with, to subdue and ultimately to understand and to control the conditions among which he exists, could only have been won by lifelong alertness of spirit, wonder and delight combating lethargy and sloth.¹

This kind of mastery, the only kind that will bring us through chaos "to the establishment of the perfect City of God", can indeed be achieved, but only by a process of living which is the opposite of that practised by the family of Smith. Algernon Smith, it has been admitted, is "thought-out and hand-made"—very like, in fact, to those distressing figures to whom Mr. Shaw so fittingly assigns this description. But it is not impossible to find a third figure to complete our series of portraits. And this time, we need not invent him. By the grace of God, he exists and has, I think, always existed; most of us, if we have had any variety of experience, know where to look to find at least one of him for ourselves.

3

We shall probably find Michael Smith sauntering through the nondescript streets that lie between the

¹ There has been no lack of prophets who have denounced the unimaginative, the irreligious, or the materialist and acquisitive conduct of the mind in the society of the twentieth century. R. H. Tawney's *Acquisitive Society*, published in 1921, indicated the stages by which our habitual attitude to our material surroundings and to our fellow-men had led to the war of 1914-18. As far as I am able to judge from a careful re-reading, the book might just as well have been a prophecy as a piece of history, so painstakingly has society since 1921 preserved the attitude and behaviour analysed and exposed there. Or we might, if we had chosen, have listened to Dean Inge, in 1917, when he clearly revealed the difference between the "naked immoralism" of our industrial and commercial system and the Christian ethical standard (*The Indictment against Christianity* (1917); *Outspoken Essays* (1919)). These and many more appeal tacitly or directly for the exercise of that faculty which "looks not to the things which are seen but to the things which are unseen". And we might reflect also upon Shelley's similar denunciation over one hundred years ago (*A Defence of Poetry*, ed. H. F. S. Brett-Smith (1923), p. 52).

publishing house at which he works and Upper Regent Street. It is a convenient area, where he can lunch on bread and cheese at a "good pull-up for car-men", which he finds a good deal more interesting than the average half-crown restaurant. It seems odd, to people like Michael, that other people never seem to realise that you can get a meal for sixpence (if you know where to go) and save the other two shillings for the gallery of the Queen's Hall. But Michael, like many other townsmen who have kept their faculties alert instead of letting them suffocate, is of an inquisitive, investigating turn. He prefers to lunch in a different place every day and see what he can discover there. To-day, for instance, there had been a bus conductor who had given him a minute description of his digestive derangements. Michael, who has a stomach like a camel, but the quick sensibilities of an active mind, had been sympathetic—is, in fact, still seething with indignation and is already half-way through constructing a fiery article for one of the weeklies. (It had often bothered Michael, to see how these huge modern buses kept the conductors and drivers at concert-pitch all through the rush hours, especially in the districts where there were a lot of short distance fares.) It ought to be got round somehow, he is reflecting, though it is hard, he admits, to see how—without ruining the "Transport". If they were to put up the fares, now, they would be able to afford more buses and to go back to the smaller size—no, that won't do, either. It would hit the working man and he'd try to walk part of the way to save the fare. Damn it! There *must* be a way round. Suppose the working men all had bicycles. . . .

Hullo! He has reached the Queen's Hall without noticing it.

He joins the end of the queue to the two-shilling gallery and goes back to drafting his article on the problem of the busmen, the buses, the workmen and the hire-purchase bicycles.

If every employer who had more than so many men were made to fit out a proper bicycle shed and if every man. . . . Why not, any way? They must work it that way in Holland and Belgium and North France, because every one bicycles to work there. This comes back to him suddenly from the days when he cycled all through those countries as a young man.

The queue begins to move towards the steps and he loses the train of his thought for a moment, as he wakes up to his surroundings and moves forward.

Well, something ought to be done. If one were to get up a newspaper campaign to induce people to cycle, and if a lot of people did, they could raise the bus fares, ease off the tempo and the hourage for the busmen and still not hurt the workmen. . . . It *ought* to work. Oh, damn! The whole thing sounds like an argument between the Walrus and the Carpenter, but something must be done, all the same.

At this point he finds himself inside the doors and makes purposefully for his favourite seat, arriving just in time to forestall a shock-haired and indecisive youth, who glares at him haughtily. He settles himself with deep contentment, partly of victory, partly of anticipation.

At forty-five, he has not outgrown the zest with which he watched the preliminaries on a concert platform as a boy. The slow filling of the auditorium is completed and the tuning up in full swing before what seem five minutes have passed. A burst of applause announces the entry of the first violin. Michael leans forward to watch him with satisfaction like that of seeing an old friend at a distance. There is another burst of applause and Malcolm Sargent takes his place. Michael sits up again in keen and delighted anticipation, joins in the applause, and then slumps comfortably back in his seat as the preliminary hush settles. The first notes of William Walton's symphony are heard. Michael reflects that he has heard it twice before. Once, two years ago, when only the first

three movements were played, and he had left the hall wondering how any man alive could resolve the problems of those movements in the fourth which was yet to come. Since then he has heard the whole. He has heard, too, what was almost as memorable, the audience rise to its feet, with round after round of applause, as there swept through them the realisation that the man bowing from the platform was the greatest living composer; that, after two hundred years in abdication, English music again held the lead in Europe. This, Michael reflects, is one of the things that happen once only in a lifetime. He remembers how he had vowed, as he walked home in the moonlight, that never again would he miss a performance of that symphony if he had to go without his dinner to buy the ticket.

This afternoon his mood is more judicial and analytic, but he is glad to find himself again convinced, by the time the third interval is reached, that the experience to which he is listening is a universal thing re-expressed in terms of his own world. Dante, Shakespeare, Beethoven achieved, in the different idioms of their different ages, what, it seems to him, this man too is attempting. Each acknowledged and accepted evil, the image of evil that his world saw, to its utmost limit and depth. And, finally, each resolved the evil into triumph or beatitude. In that illumination, light and sound merge together, imaging each other, radiance and music. What was it Dante had said when he came out from hell into the light of the stars? "*Dolce color d'oriental zaffiro*". . . . And Shakespeare: "Not hear it?—The music of the spheres."

As the audience filters in at the close of the third interval, another train of ideas starts up in his mind. Who was it, who said, after hearing one of the Brandenburg Concertos, "If that is true, then all is indeed well"? Odd, when you come to think of it, how precisely that expresses what one might say about Bach's music: "*If that is true . . .*" There's the qualification; the possibility

of doubt entering, not because you question the sureness of Bach's serenity, the sustained beatitude of his experience, but because you question whether it has ever taken account of the evil that besieges the lives of common men, whether, in that sense, it is "true". Now, no man could say this of Beethoven's ninth, even if he heard it for the first time. You make no qualification there. When you have heard the fourth movement of that symphony, you *know* that all is indeed well. You know it, because the man who made that radiant affirmation made it in full knowledge of the experience of the second movement and of the third: "He descended into Hell, and the third day he rose again from the dead." That is the unchanging nature of man's spiritual pilgrimage and the sublime artist carries the signs of it always upon him. And here, it seems, is another man, a man of the twentieth century, recording that same journey, the despair, agony and ultimate resolution of the evil of this present age.

He is distracted from his reflections for a moment by a couple of Academy students clasp ing scores who stumble over his feet. This does not annoy him much. In the top gallery you must expect to be surrounded by students, and on the whole Michael rather likes them; you can, after all, upon occasion borrow their scores. The conductor is back in his place now. A hush settles again, deeper than that of a cathedral, but alert.

As he listens to the resolution of the fourth movement—that resolution that he once believed to be beyond the might of man—he grows steadily surer that this pilgrimage has been attempted yet again, and achieved. Here is the grand style, the sublime, again informing a work of art. And here again that supreme assurance that can only be won by one road: "Dolce color d'oriental zaffiro." The sweet light of the stars shines out again, beyond the hell that only the men of Michael's own world know.

"If all the rest of the art perishes and that survives," Michael reflects, as he walks back along Regent Street,

"it will serve for a record to all time of what this age suffered and believed."

His reflections are interrupted by a greengrocer's window that catches his eye and he slows to a standstill looking at the colours of the fruit. The reflections of any man are liable to be interrupted in the streets of London, but there is perhaps this much to put to Michael's credit, that, having long ago discovered that it is better to attend to the things you like than to the things you dislike, his absorption is more penetrable by delight than by annoyance. This, of course, raises problems with traffic and he will probably some day (as his wife is convinced) walk under a motor bus. Now, can he afford fourpence for a persimmon? Yes, be dammed to it, he can! (It may as well be admitted at once that he always does.) He remembers in a flash the hot, white courtyard and the wooden tables by the edge of the lake where he and Mary ate them for the first time some twenty years ago. After examining the pile carefully from outside, he goes in and picks out, with great exactitude, the one with the finest colour. He may be consistently extravagant, but he is never an indifferent shopper.

The rush has died down and, when he reaches it, the moving staircase is nearly empty. He always enjoys the sight of this staircase; the clean, plain stones of wall and roofing, the long, steep downward dive of the stairs, the straight lines converging with precision and fidelity, like a demonstration of the laws of perspective. But to-night he feels a sharp prick of delight as he stands at the top of the great, tilted tunnel and is borne slowly down towards the smooth, dull floor sprinkled with tiny people who gradually grow life-sized as he approaches. Looking down, as he is doing, half obliquely and not directly from above, there is added the absurd effect of figures all leaning sideways, slanting parallel to each other as they walk, like artificially balanced puppets. He wonders, as he often does, that some modern playwright does not set a scene

at the top of one of these swift-diving artificial ravines. Producers and scene-painters could manage the effects—or, at least, presumably they could; some of these young men in the theatre to-day are equal to anything that calls for skill and fertility of invention. (The Paris theatre, he reflects, reached that phase twenty years ago, of course. The usual time-lag.) After all, it is precisely the style of some of our best poster artists. (Which, by the way, conditioned the other? The artists the architects, or the architects the artists?) Remarkable stuff, some of those posters that the bus companies and underground railways use; a picture gallery to be had for nothing as you go to and from work. (Michael, we may remind ourselves, has not got the mountains of Cumberland before him every day. But he has got the posters of the railway companies—as, incidentally, has Algernon Smith.)

He is half-way down now and, the dizzy exhilaration lessening, his attention is caught by the advertisements at the side. It reminds him of *Alice in Wonderland*, given him as a small boy by an aunt, and the description of Alice floating down the long shaft of the rabbit hole, looking at the groceries on the shelves as she went by. And here he is—and millions of other people every day—drifting upward and downwards through just such shafts and at just such a pace, slowly enough to read things on the walls as they go past. He wonders idly what Lewis Carroll would think if he came back to London for ten minutes to-day to find his fancy substantiated in metal and stone. He is going on to speculate on Alice's pot of marmalade and to wonder whether some day, when the world is still busier, it will be possible to fit up automatic machines down the sides of moving staircases, so that a very quick man in a very great hurry can buy his cigarettes and his evening paper as he floats past, and even . . .

He reaches the bottom and nearly falls over through forgetting to step off in time.

In the tube, after a glance at his fellow-passengers, he

settles down to study his programme. He generally leaves this till the return journey, humming under his breath the passages printed and jotting down in the margin others that are still running in his head. He regrets sometimes that he has never had any training in music; clefs and keys still bother him when he is in a hurry. But the results of his strange jottings are intelligible to him and he can re-read them when he wants to recall a passage. On this occasion, he finds with satisfaction that the noise of the train is great enough for him to hum aloud as he works without drawing too much attention from the other passengers.

Coming out of the tube at the other end of his journey he feels the sudden exhilaration of the open air on a fine September evening. His way leads out of the main street with a half-mile walk up the hill to the other part of the town, a part that not so long ago was a village, but that the spreading suburb has reached and swallowed up. There is a small wind stirring, enough to keep the leaves of the plane-trees in continual movement, their pale undersides flickering among the dark green upper surfaces. But up above it is stiller, and full, white clouds move slowly, clear-cut upon a sharp blue sky. A rowan tree in a garden half-way up the hill has turned suddenly red in the last three days. Michael never sees a rowan without a picture flashing into his mind, a slender, brilliant tree rooted high up in a tumble of dark-grey rock at a sudden turn in a white road beside a stream, and the distant isle of Eigg, a clear, grey outline far behind it. September often seems to affect him like this, this sudden nostalgia for heather and grey rock:

Grey recumbent tombs of the dead in desert places,
Standing stones on the vacant wine-red moor,
Hills of sheep, and the homes of the silent vanished races,
And winds austere and pure.

He begins to speculate as he goes on up the hill. Now, would it be possible to get a few days in the mountains

this October? The best colours of all come in October with the bracken turning. (A distant memory of the Cairn Gorms, kept fresh by a succession of L.M.S. posters, shoots across his mind.) Surely, if they went with rucksacks, on their bicycles . . . accommodation would be cheap as late in the season as that. . . . Could it be done? If he were to leave off smoking, of course. . . . He looks thoughtfully at the pipe he has taken mechanically out of his pocket and puts it back again. He could save perhaps three shillings a week that way. If he did it for a year, it would go a long way towards paying, retrospectively, for the holiday. Somehow, this train of thought seems familiar . . . he has a dim suspicion that he has made these calculations before, but that nothing much has come of it. . . . It is a pity all the mountains are so far away. A pity there isn't some cheap way of travelling by train, say a kind of fourth class or goods van, like going by a cargo-boat instead of a liner. . . .

He puts the key in the latch and shouts "Mary!" before he has closed the door.

A faint "Hullo" comes from the other end of the house and he goes through the garden where his wife is tying up the tomato plants. He kisses her heartily.

"What a lovely smell? What is it?"

"It's the tomato leaves—I've got it all over me. Haven't you noticed it before?"

"No, never." He breaks off a leaf, crushes and sniffs it. "It's rather like scented geranium. They can't be the same kind of plant, can they?"

"Don't know. Dick'll know when they come in."

"Where are they?"

"Gone out to Chilbury with their bicycles. Barbara's sketching and Dick's bird-watching."

"Good. They'll have had a gorgeous day." To make the most of what is left of it himself, he lies down on his back on the grass under a small pear tree, looking up into the stiff upward-pointing branches where the

pears are already turning red among their grey-green leaves.

The garden is not large, and it, like the house, is never likely to be his own; but the instinct which made his ancestor John Smith cling to his Cumberland croft is still alive in him. Tenaciously, and sometimes even fiercely, he has fought for the right to a piece of soil to cultivate, where he can watch things grow; and if you asked him to name the chief virtue of the London Transport system, he would probably say, "enabling a poor man to live far enough out of town to have a garden."

"Oh, darling, that grass is damp; there was a shower this afternoon."

"Was there? Oh, I don't think I'll hurt. I've got my old clothes on, anyway."

"Yes, you always have, darling. But it's you catching cold, I'm thinking of." Mary goes to the back porch of the house and brings out a ground sheet, a rug and a cushion.

"There, that's better, isn't it?"

"It is my dear, *thank* you." His hand goes after his pipe again, but he remembers the mountains just in time and puts it back safely. Then he feels in the other pocket and meets the persimmon.

"Lord, I nearly sat on this! Oh no, it's all right. Here you are. Isn't it a gorgeous one?"

"Oh Michael, what a colour! I don't see how we can eat it. It's too good to look at."

"Neither do I. But I think we will. Got a knife? We'll divide it."

"Never taste quite the same after they've travelled, do they? But it's very good. It's a marvel how they get them those hundreds of miles without a bruise. It's not as if they were oranges; they're nearly as soft as tomatoes. Well, I enjoyed that. *And*, by the way, my dear, that's one of the things we shan't get if there's a war."

"I don't see how we shall get any fruit if there's a war,

except home-grown apples and what we can tin from the soft fruit harvests."

"No, it all comes of being a big, acquisitive, industrial concern, my dear. If you'd been content to live like your ancestors, as a decent, Border crofter——"

"I don't know that I'm responsible——"

"Well, I mean, generally. If we'd *all* been content——"

"You mean if other people had been content. You and I would have been, more or less, Michael. That's what's wrong."

"H'm. Yes. Well, it's done now. . . ."

"But, you know, where my grandparents lived no one had ever heard an orchestra in his life. . . . Did you enjoy it?"

"Oh, my dear! That symphony was superb. Did you listen? How did it come over?"

"Pretty well. Fine enough. But relaying music *does* smudge the instruments together, Michael, whatever you say."

"I know it does. You must come in to town next time it's played. We'll go together. Did you notice that bit in the first movement. . . ."

While Mary goes in to get the supper, he still lies under the pear-tree watching the birds flutter in and out after flies. A small, slender, buffish-yellow body, very neatly finished and streamlined, darts on to a bough half-way up the tree. The mate arrives on another bough a yard away.

"Ah, the willow-wrens! Good. Sorry Dick's not here. Perhaps they'll stay." He watches them drowsily till his eye is drawn to a movement obliquely behind him. Knowing what to expect he lies still. A small, golden-speckled object, long in the leg and vibrating with curiosity, hops cautiously round him, stopping at intervals to look thoughtfully at him sideways. It is the last of a summer brood—very late in changing its coat—a brood he has grown to know fairly well this last week by lying and

reading in the garden for an hour or so every evening before supper.

"Queer thing about robins. They can't leave a human being alone. Now, it could get just as many ants on the other side of the lawn—unfortunately. But it must come and see what there is to be seen." It comes.

In fact, summoning up all its resources of curiosity and courage, it hops on to his ankle, where it balances precariously, palpitating with delight and alarm, before terror overtakes it and it whirrs up into the pear tree and peers down sideways from the lowest branch.

"All right, my dear," Michael speaks soothingly, and, moving very slowly, feels in his pocket for a few crumbs. The robin is but doubtfully reassured and watches him critically as he stretches out his hand as far away from him as possible on the grass and lies still again.

There is a pause, a flutter, and a small body on stilts arrives within a few inches of the hand. It considers, hops, pauses again, pecks suddenly and withdraws. Then it approaches with less reflection, hops on to the hand, where it scrabbles for a footing with its queer little cool claws, and gobbles quickly. A leaf flutters in the grass and it whirrs back to the pear-tree. Mary comes out.

"My dear, the most lovely thing has just happened. The family robin has eaten out of my hand!"

"Oh, my darling! Well, I'm not surprised. Wild birds do eat out of some people's hands—not everybody's. My father used to read us a poem about a hermit called Mirvan. All the birds and mice and things used to join him for meals. He was that sort of person. Hullo, there's Dick and Barbara. Had a good day, children?"

"Dad, would you be quite sure if you saw a reed warbler? Because I *think* I saw one."

"Well, not quite sure, Dicky. Not unless I'd got glasses. Anyway, I think you'd know better than I would, now. (I'm on very good terms with our robin, though, I'd have

you know.) Where did you see it and how near did you get? Hullo, Barbara! Had a good day?"

"Yes, pretty good, thanks. I did one sketch. It's in the dining-room. Look, Daddy; I was thinking to-day of something."

"What?"

"Well, if I go to the Art School next year——"

"You *will*, my dear, short of the skies falling!"

"Bless you, Daddy! Well, *when* I go, I've got an idea for making some money as I go along. You know, as a matter of fact, I'm growing up not too bad-looking."

"You think so, do you?"

"Oh, it's nothing to make a fuss about. It's not my doing. But it is an asset. And we might as well use it. You see I think I could probably pick up some work as a model. Did you know they paid 12s. 6d. a day?"

"I did. But that's for professionals, as it happens. It's not a thing just anybody can do straight off."

"I know. But even professionals have got to begin. And I'd be right in the thick of things there; right in the business. Doing two things at once, you know. Making part of my expenses and getting to know quite a lot of artists who might be awfully useful to me later on, if I do turn out to be any good myself. What do you think?"

"H'm. Well it's a possibility, certainly."

"It jolly well is. Anyway, it's better than going on the streets in one's spare time, which was what lots of the Moscow students had to do to keep themselves going, you know."

"Oh, much better," Michael agrees dryly.

"No, but, seriously, Daddy. I think it would work."

"So do I, my dear. What's bothering me is that I think you'd work—too much. Do you know posing is one of the most exhausting trades in the world, worse than serving in a tea shop? Still, one day a week mightn't be too bad. And you certainly have got hair that's popularly known as 'corn-coloured'."

At the back of his mind, as he is talking, Michael is resolving that he *will* remember this time to look up the Art scholarships offered by the L.C.C. and the Schools of Art. (The London educational institutions fairly bristle with scholarships if you only know how to find them. Trouble is, most people don't. Plenty of resources—that's like the modern economic system all over—with the distribution for ever breaking down! Now, first thing on Monday evening! Remember! The local library will have the lists. Useful things, borough libraries.)

"Dinner's ready," Mary calls from inside.

"Hullo!" Michael strolls into the dining-room after the others are settled. "That the sketch? Oh, I like that, Barbara! I must say you do make hills *look* like hills. We *must* try to get a few days in real mountains this year, if we have to sell our shirts to get there. I want you to see some of those rocky bits in the Lakes. You can see they are alive when you look at them."

"Couldn't we cycle to the Lakes, Daddy, and save the train fare?"

"If you were prepared to go hard all day," Dick remarks as he cuts the bread. "And take about ten days over it, and go all through the Black Country cycling on the setts, I should think you would quite enjoy the trip. I shouldn't."

"Oh Dick! Don't be destructive!"

"Well, a few things are better destroyed, you know. And quite insane suggestions are among them. No, but, look here. I know a man who's got an old Ford, and I know he's going abroad for October and leaving it behind. He'd let you have it, I believe, for just the price of the wear-and-tear on tyres and so forth. I'll ask him to-morrow. Then you could put tents in the back and have no hotel bills at all. You could do a fortnight on five pounds each in luxury, including the petrol and what you paid him."

"Where'd we get the tents?"

"Everybody's got a tent nowadays. We'll all start asking round. That'll be easy."

"And the old army blankets in the summer-house would make the best sleeping sacks," Mary makes her contribution to the proposal. "We'll get them out to-morrow morning, Barbara, and measure them."

"I say, let's have the light on, can we, my dear? I'm swallowing most of the bones in these excellent herrings because I can't see them till they're in my mouth."

"Oh, sorry, Michael! Yes, will you, Dick? Thanks."

There is silence as nothing happens.

"Fused again. No, don't you bother, Dad. It won't take me two ticks. I've got plenty of fuse-wire up in my bedroom."

"That's the worst of these old houses," Michael agrees. "They're nice and roomy and they're very cheap. But they do seem to fall to pieces all round you."

"Well, a fuse isn't anything very bad. You wouldn't really want to live in one of the Elphinstone Park villas, would you?"

"God forbid! Which he has done, anyway, by making them double our rent."

"And as Dick can repair anything under the sun," Barbara adds complacently, "it really doesn't matter much. He likes doing it, too."

"Look here, Mother, if you leave the kitchen door open and don't clatter the plates too much, you'll be able to hear the Oslo Festival concert," says Dick, coming back into the room. The sounds of music and faint splutterings follow him from across the narrow hall. "I haven't got the selector working quite right yet, but I'll get the volume as loud as I dare without spoiling the tone. You ought to hear it, really."

"Oh, I'll leave the washing-up for a bit. I can do it later on. I'd like to hear that concert—part of it, anyhow."

"Well come along now. They're just going to do some

things from the composers before Grieg—Nordraak and those people. It's very interesting stuff. Come on."

Michael is already standing by the wireless set, making a few half-hearted adjustments, torn between an intense desire to manipulate it himself and the certain knowledge that his son can do it a good deal better.

"Oh, come on, Dicky. I'd better not try to clear this or I may lose the whole thing. You do it. What I can't understand is how you ever manage to pick up Oslo on that set. Very clever of you. Heaven knows, it was pretty old when I bought it."

"Well I got a few odd parts renewed Dad. And then it's mostly a matter of trial and error. There it is! We'll leave it at that, I think. All right for you, Mother?"

An hour later the concert ends.

"Well, thank you, Dick." Mary puts down the stocking she has been darning. "I'm going to do the washing-up now and your father's going to work. Don't be too late, Michael. You're looking fagged out already. After all, it is the week-end."

"Well. . . . No, I'm not specially tired. I want to finish that thing for *The Spokesman*. It ought to get into next week's issue if it's to be in time to make any impression."

"Which one, Dad? The one about bus-drivers, the one about modern music, the one about rural communities or the one about the Education Bill?"

"Education Bill, this time."

"Well, make it strong about money and privilege."

"I will, my dear, you may be sure of it. We won't get a new society till we get nearer to equality—not to equality of literacy, which has been tried and hasn't worked, but equality of real education, which hasn't been tried and *will* work. By the way what do *you* think real education is, Barbara?"

"Well, Daddy, we were talking about that in the sixth in lunch hour the other day. We thought, or one or two of us did, that it oughtn't to set out to make people into

certain shapes decided on beforehand, but it ought to do more to let them *grow*—if you see what I mean?”

“I do indeed, my dear. And then?”

“Well, I thought it ought to be done somehow like this: first letting people discover themselves—you know half the time now education stops that by telling them what they *ought* to become . . .”

(“Only too true, unfortunately.”)

“And then let them develop the self they’ve discovered. And then let them—I can’t find a word for it—you might say ‘dedicate’ the self they’ve developed.”

“It’s a good word for it. . . .”

“Of course, it’s easy to say it like that and hard to make a large, national scheme that would allow anything of that kind to be worked out. But I believe, if you’ve got your main idea and stick to it, you can make your ‘means’, don’t you?”

“I do indeed. But you’ll make a nation of individualists that way, my girl. And they are not docile citizens, you know. What about *that*?”

“Yes. Well, St. Paul was not a particularly docile citizen, was he? Nor was Christ. Nor Oliver Cromwell. That’s what’s wanted.”

“That is what’s wanted. I agree. Yes, education determines political issues in the long run. The totalitarian governments have got hold of that simple fact, all right. That’s why some of us mean to fight for the opposite kind—the education that allows a man to grow up into Cromwell or Lincoln if that’s what he’s like, or into Shakespeare or Shelley if *that’s* what he’s like. That’s why this new Bill is going to be important—to get people to see that in time, to get the press to wake them up. And that’s why I’d better go and get on with that article now! Good night, my dear.”

“I hope your father isn’t going to be too outspoken. Oh, I oughtn’t to say that. I mustn’t fidget.” As Mary turns on the hot water and piles the dishes in the sink,

Dick puts down his Bentham and Hooker and comes over to take up a dish cloth.

"Darling, I shouldn't worry. I don't think Dad minds what happens to him."

"I know."

"And he must say what he thinks, mustn't he? And he *can* write, you know. People listen to him. It doesn't make any money to speak of, but they listen to it."

"Oh, I know, Dick, I know. I've tried all my life to do without money as far as possible, so as to leave your father free to use his spare time writing those kinds of things. Sometimes I wonder if I've been a bit unfair to you two children. . . ."

"*Darling, don't be absurd!*" Barbara brings in a pile of plates from the kitchen. "How could it hurt us? Don't you think it better to have been a bit poor and to have known that your father would say what he believed even if he was put in prison for it——"

"Well, it hasn't quite come to that yet, you know," says Dick soothingly, holding up a large dish to drip before he begins to dry it.

"No, I know. I don't mean that he *will*. But just feeling that he *would*. I mean, if he thinks a thing's got to be said—like this attack on what he calls 'regimentation of mind'—nothing will stop him saying it. We'll be all right, Mother; don't you worry."

"Well, I don't worry much, as a rule. As I always did say, if you've married a man with an imagination, well, he's got to work for the world and you've got to work for him. And you've just got to remember that all the time. All right, Dick, I'll finish drying up. Just go and turn on the electric heater in your father's room, will you? It's getting chilly and he'll never think of it. You can slip in without disturbing him."

It is two o'clock by the time Michael gets up from his writing table, slightly dizzy, but well satisfied with his night's work. He goes quietly into the kitchen, switches

on the light, thankful that he no longer has to wander about in the night with a guttering candle, and finds, as he expected, a tray in the middle of the table. He is suddenly amazingly hungry. He takes the cover off the plate and finds brown sandwiches. He lifts the corner of one. Ah! Minced underdone beef and chopped onion. Just what he would have chosen! He pours out a glass of hot china tea from the thermos and squeezing in a few drops of lemon, drinks it down as he stands looking round the kitchen, delighting in its clean, polished neatness. Queer how rooms differ: a study should be muddled and untidy and full of books; a bedroom should be airy and empty and peaceful; a kitchen should shine with bright, hard efficiency like a newly built underground station. . . . He takes the sandwiches in his hand, tip-toes out into the garden and sits down on a wooden bench to eat them.

The moon is up and the leaves of the pear-tree, moving gently in a faint breeze, shine with pale light. A late rose scents the air beside him, its deep red just visible. The paler flowers, the pink roses and the evening primroses stand out clearly and the white roses and the tall bushes of phlox shine as if the radiance came from within them. "But at the gates o' Paradise, that bush grew fair enough," he murmurs, irrelevantly and slightly inaccurately, as he makes his way back into the house. . . .

Michael Smith clearly offers us a different picture again. When we consider these three in succession, we can hardly help noticing that Michael Smith has a certain family likeness to John Smith, but nothing in common with Algernon Smith except some of the surroundings they both move among. In their attitudes to the worlds about them, different though these may be, there is an essential likeness between the first and the third figures of our group; does this attitude, common to them both, derive from the living imagination which informs both minds? Moreover, in describing, in John and in Michael, men who have a living relationship with the things that come

their way in daily life, have we perhaps discovered that the habit of establishing such a relationship leads imperceptibly to reality in all a man's relations, whether with things, with people, with nature, with events, with institutions or with ideas? These two men will bring to all the wider problems that they have to consider a similar criterion, will respond to them with the same eagerness, sympathy and resoluteness. Above all, they *will* respond; they will always feel an impulse to act, to investigate or to reflect. But Algernon Smith's inability to do any of these things is not the inevitable result of the siege of modern mechanisation; it is the result of passive acquiescence in that siege. If the modern townsman were conditioned absolutely, with no power of effective rebellion, by the material surroundings peculiar to our age, we should not be able to discover Michael Smith. But Michael Smith is there. He is not overwhelmed by the facilities of the modern world; he does not sink into a habit of imaginative inertia, he is not seduced into helpless dependence on them. He recognizes them for what they are, moves among them with freedom, delights in them sometimes, resists them at others and uses instead of abusing their resources. He seems to derive more enjoyment and more refreshment from a two-shilling seat in the gallery of the Queen's Hall, and from a number of incidental delights that the world about him provides without any charge at all, than Algernon Smith does from either his expensive house in a fashionable suburb or a visit of several weeks to the most impressive mountains in the British Isles. But Algernon Smith's treatment of his wireless set will have told us at the outset that the man who can only abuse one set of facilities will almost certainly be unable to use another. And the first five minutes we spend with Michael Smith will suggest that the man who can use one appreciatively can probably use them all.

We might notice one more thing in Michael's favour, a

thing that tells us more of his quality as a man and a citizen than it might, at first glance, appear to be. He does not repine unduly over the things he cannot have. He is a mountain-lover. But if it is your misfortune to be employed in London instead of Aberdeen or Dublin, you cannot shut your office-door every evening and go home by bus or bicycle to a small house in the hills. Mechanised civilisation, by forcing Michael into the kind of employment that is only available in a large city, has taken the mountains from him for the greater part of his life. As he has a wife and children he cannot remedy this state of things, like Thoreau, by taking an axe and settling at Walden. (This is, in any case, rather less practicable in England in the mid-twentieth century than in a partially undeveloped New England State in the late nineteenth.) He substitutes as far as possible something else, or a number of other things. We have no right to assume that there is no pain in this process, but we can observe that an intelligent use of the facilities that he *has* got serves him tolerably well in place of Braeriach or Snowdon which he has not got. Being adult (which few of us are, even when we die), he knows, even if unconsciously, that the spirit of man, like his body, can nourish itself on alternative foods; provided the diet is balanced, it can be constructed in terms of quite different articles. He does not, that is, share the widespread superstition that the mind is conditioned directly by what it takes in. We are all accustomed to the idea that the body, by a complicated process, breaks down its food by the use of its own chemical apparatus into constituents which it can assimilate. But we sometimes show ourselves woefully unaware of the chemistry of the spirit and of spiritual dietetics. Michael, whether he is conscious or not of his assumptions, makes few of these mistakes.

I think we may rest assured that he is the man we have been looking for; a man living under the common conditions of the population of our great towns and their

suburbs, a common citizen who is yet the high product of modern civilisation; a man who uses its resources instead of being conditioned by them. He is, in fact, a man of a kind that never quite perishes from the earth, a man whose living imagination irradiates and consumes the "lethargy of custom". He is an incarnation of the imaginative will in terms of a civilisation that sometimes seems finally to have destroyed it.

It is precisely for lack of this that many of us abuse our heritage and, as we have seen, starve in the midst of plenty. And this starvation has, not unnaturally, the same sort of effect on the muscle of the spirit as its physical equivalent has upon the body's. The spirit remains puny and undeveloped (in some of us it would seem to be little more than embryonic) so that it can learn no skill and is incapable of independent action. Therefore many of us live lives determined for us by surroundings to which we react like automata in a series of disjointed responses. And as groups and nations, we are driven in bewilderment through slumps and booms and depressions into economic hostilities until we find ourselves plunged into wars in which we, the people, have all to lose and nothing to gain. But both of these have happened because we, the people, have shirked the essential tasks of our mental life, have not taken our heritage seriously, our privileges reverently or our responsibilities gravely; because, in spite of the voices of the prophets, we have let wonder and the living imagination die out of our lives and have drifted on, equating happiness with success, with possessions or with the gratification of ambition, and taking the world around us for granted. But Michael Smith's attitude to this world is, in all essentials, that of a poet and this is the root of the difference between his way of life and that which we have examined in ourselves and found wanting.

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III

THE IMAGINATIVE WILL

In understanding be men.—I Cor. 14, 20.

III

THE IMAGINATIVE WILL¹

"PORRO UNUM NECESSARIUM." The defect which lies at the root of our failure is defect of imagination.

For the faculty which, in daily life and in practical living, transmutes dead circumstance into live experience is closely akin in its function and method of operation to the faculty upon whose exercise the artistic process depends, the power which poets have generally called imagination. In the art of living, of which conduct is the outward expression, I believe the exercise of this faculty to be essential too, and for very similar reasons.

What a poet is led to do when he writes a poem may, I think, be partly expressed by saying that he tries to perceive something of the essence of the thing, event, feeling about which he is writing. The first intimation that he is perceiving something comes perhaps in a flash, a single point of illumination, perhaps in a broad diffusion of awareness and sympathy with its being. There is, that is to say, a partial identification of himself with it; something that we may call aesthetic experience, derived through the senses. He looks, it may be, at a mountain and feels, far below the conscious level of words, something not unlike the sense he might have of personality in another human being. It is now no longer a mere grouping of line and colour (satisfying, maybe, in themselves) but something which possesses spirit and which, during that instant of perception, he knows to be expressing that spirit.

If afterwards he writes a poem in which he himself expresses this experience of his own, another and further process will occur (what is sometimes called artistic experience as distinguished from the aesthetic experience

¹ Wordsworth: *The Excursion*, IV, 1128.

I have just tried to describe) which itself has certain clear phases. At the beginning of these, he more or less deliberately recollects his earlier experience, subjecting himself to it, and, by an act of great concentration, excluding irrelevant thought or emotion upon the one hand and keeping back any attempt at premature expression upon the other. As he immerses himself completely in the recollected nature of what he is contemplating, certain other faculties begin to work and some kind of selection, at a deep level of consciousness, shapes out the form of a poem which expresses his experience. Though at this stage he often sees it as a whole, rather than as a series of parts, from this point onward, images, cadences, rhymes arise in his conscious mind and, if the earlier phases have been deeply felt, they are inevitable words and the verbal music they create is a simultaneous expression of the theme in another mode. The whole is a continuous process; obviously in the case of a major work of art it cannot be strictly continuous in time, but the last words must be written with the original emotion still in control.¹

Now, it will be seen that though some of the later phases of this process are the special province of the poet, the painter, the musician, a great part of it—far greater, I think, than we are generally inclined to allow—can find a place in the life of every man. The sense of awe, of absorption in the essential quality of a thing or an event, this wonder which is itself an act of worship, is a part of our common experience, though we often deny it and thwart its working. This surrender of self in the effort to be identified with and to explore something not oneself we all experience, though we do not always admit it, when we are absorbed in work or play, when we listen to a symphony or perform some act requiring skill, concentration and co-ordination of faculties. The reverence, again, the genesis of the whole, is innate in most of us, however we succeed in hiding it by bluster and the curious

¹ See the additional note A on p. 135.

cynicism of some of our conventions. To live unintermittently in the exercise of these faculties would be to live as few, perhaps, even who are poets live continuously. But to live as constantly in this mood as possible is to live as a poet does and as much of mankind is fundamentally disposed to do.

The imagination of the "plain man", then, is to this extent like the poet's imagination. They have that earliest phase, which we called aesthetic experience, in common.¹ They have, that is, a natural tendency to approach the world about them in the same way. They would, but for an extraordinarily widespread mistrust of imaginative experience among the Anglo-Saxon races, have far more in common. As things stand, the plain man is all too often a man, possessed at first of some degree of natural poetic feeling, who has let himself be trained into artificial inarticulateness in feeling and in thought. He has been reared in a curious idol-worship in which sensibility is denied because it is confused with sentiment (incidentally one of the surest ways of substituting sentiment for sensibility), so that the finer reaches of thought and feeling have become Restricted Areas into which it is not manly or gentlemanly or practical or sociable (according to cast, creed and sex) to enter. Under this dispensation one is often tempted to think that what primarily distinguishes a poet from an ordinary man is his extraordinary courage, since he has been prepared, from childhood upward, to suffer martyrdom in maintaining the value of his own individual experience and his innate reverence for the universe about him.²

But this widespread mistrust of imagination which has done so much to make an artificial separation between the poet and the plain man, has its deepest roots less in a

¹ See Note A, p. 135.

² This sometimes strikes with surprise those who have accepted the convention that equates sensibility with softness and overlook the intense individualism by means of which the poetic attitude is maintained throughout a lifetime or the conflicts and sufferings that that entails.

passing convention than in a fundamental misunderstanding. How often do we not hear the imagination spoken of as if it were equivalent to fancy, or even almost to whim or obsession? The time-honoured phrase "that's all just imagination!", spoken by some admonitory mother or nurse, thus indicates an odd state of affairs. It implies that the faculty whose exercise is one of the most arduous disciplines possible to the mind of man, the faculty that can lead us "into all knowledge", is something on no higher level than an idle dream or nightmare. Yet that it can so lead us is a point on which there can be no compromising. Let us make no mistake: the disciplined imagination, the "imaginative will", as Wordsworth calls it, is one of the most direct roads (if not the most direct) to the knowledge of reality. It is the means by which we pass from slavery to mastery in our relation to the forces at work upon the world and is, in no secondary sense, the servant of the Most High God.

This same misunderstanding of its quality leads us, again, to speak of the exercise of the imagination as if it were a form of escapism. Well, every act that consists in moving (physically or mentally) from one place to another is escapism if you choose to call it so. It will depend mainly upon whether you lay the emphasis on what is escaped from or what is escaped to. A man who marries is not commonly referred to as "escaping" from bachelorhood; yet he does. A man who goes into a monastery, on the other hand, is freely accused of escaping—though from what, his accusers do not usually find it easy to explain.

Just so, imaginative thought is often treated (by those, be it understood, who do *not* practise it) as though it were a mild narcotic of the soul, producing rosy illusions that make actual life insupportable to the dreamer when he unwillingly awakes. I would call that form of mental indulgence (which by the way is generally the result of acute mental starvation and no more "deserves a dark

house and a whip" than does physical starvation) by the simple name of fantasy. The contrast between them is most sharply revealed when we remind ourselves that the real exercise of the imagination is sometimes the best, often the only possible cure of this habit. There is no connection, except that of dead opposites, between the green-sickness that takes to fantasy like gin, for respite from circumstance and for oblivion, and the tenacious and often painful effort to perceive, by the strenuous exercise of the imagination, a reality more nearly whole than our objective experience affords.

But there is a further reason, even than these misinterpretations of its quality, for our refusal to use our imaginations powerfully and energetically in everyday life: most of us recoil from what our instincts recognise as a formidable and strenuous task even while our superficial selves are belittling the very faculty whose exercise we dread. When Shakespeare wrote the superb succession of imaginative explorations that leads from *Troilus and Cressida* through *Lear* to *The Tempest* it was no easy play of fancy that guided him down through successive circles of hell and up into purgatory and the light of the stars again, any more than it was fancy that guided Dante on his precisely similar journey. When Blake said, "The world of imagination is the world of eternity", he was laying deliberate emphasis upon the element of enduring reality in imaginative thought and experience,¹ and Wordsworth as naturally gives to it a similar function when he describes its process as "proceeding from, and governed by a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers". But the attainment of these mighty and enduring things demands an ardour and endurance from which, unless we clearly perceive the value, indeed the necessity of the strife, we shall certainly shrink. And it is this natural shrinking which is mainly responsible for our refusal to accept the paths

¹ See Note B, p. 136.

of the poetic imagination, which, though they make great demands, lead to correspondingly great assurance.

But if these attempts to evade the responsibility of imaginative thought arise only from misunderstanding or from natural weakness of spirit, they must no longer discredit it in our eyes. We can put them aside, and, returning again to the mind of the poet, which was our starting point, consider the imagination as the faculty by which we may make all things new, transmute pain to joy, negative to positive, loss to having. Through it, lifeless event, fact, matter become living reality and the process of day-to-day existence an act of worship. The transmutation which it makes gives a standard of reality firm enough to resist inertia, servility, superstition on the one hand and sensationalism, sentimentality and shams on the other, whether in public life or in the recesses of the mind. Some such transmutation alone can save us, first as individuals and then as nations, from the body of this death in which society is suffocated. You may say that this is an absurd thing to demand, that it is beyond human might; yet it has not been beyond the might of the poets and the whole company of the saints from the beginning of recorded history. You may say that we shall never induce our town-dwelling voters and tax-payers to make the demand upon their inner lives which alone will put them in possession of this touchstone of reality; yet it was not beyond the power of millions of men and women in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, who responded to the catastrophes of the Black Death and the religious persecutions by a transmutation of their natures no less profound than this suggested here. You may say that very few even of us who advocate it will succeed beyond the initial steps. . . . That may be, for it is not an easy way. But we can only reply, as to that, with a greater man before us: "I perceive not yet . . . but that this is the way to the desired haven." "The way is the way, and there is an end."¹

¹ Bunyan: *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Everyman, pp. 72, 284.

Now, if we are agreed that the seed of this imaginative life is there in all men, might it not be well to consider what would be the result of such imaginative thought in the daily life of every man, what may perhaps be the function of imagination here, and what its processes? We shall keep in mind our analogy with the poet's habit of life and of thought, but we shall extend it to include the life and thought of common men.

Its general function is, as we have suggested, to lead to a knowledge of reality, and this it does in the first place by widening our experience. To say this presupposes that the knowledge reached through the imagination is at least the equal of the knowledge that results from contact with event and that imagination can therefore fill the place of what is commonly called experience.¹ This may at first seem a paradox. But is it? Experience, as we generally suppose, is arrived at in response to event and circumstance. But unless the balance of circumstances in any given life be very fortunate, the experience derived solely from actual happenings and contacts will give a man but a one-sided and incomplete impression of reality. In the majority of men, on the other hand, we find that wisdom and understanding are not strictly proportioned to what they have, in the common phrase, "been through"; in some we are surprised to find it far beyond what the circumstances might be expected to have bestowed on them. Some other factor must intervene, some other force must be at work beside the blind impact of circumstance. I believe that this other factor is imagination, which works in greater or less degree with circumstance to produce what we recognise as experience. The exercise

¹ I use the word "experience" here and later in two main ways. First, to describe a condition or state resulting from a man's response to circumstance (as above). In this sense the word is often used in common speech as a rough equivalent of "wisdom", or to indicate a kind of combination of mental, moral, and spiritual skill. Second, to refer rather to the thing experienced; and here it may go to make up part of man's total "experience" in the first sense. In both, of course, there is an element of active co-operation as well as of reception, the co-operating factor being, as I have suggested, the imagination.

of imagination has, in these cases, redressed the balance of some hopelessly one-sided or limited set of opportunities, ekeing out the deficiencies of what actual life presented. This suggests that imaginative exploration is an essential part of all valid experience even for those whose circumstances are fortunate. We may go further and say that no amount of "event" will by itself serve to produce the condition known as experience in a mind refusing to make an imaginative response.

Nevertheless, there is a delusion that a mere series of things happening to us can produce this effect which, by its very nature, can only be gained by mental or spiritual exercise (this too arises from and in turn contributes to our general disregard of the imagination and its functions). The nature of this delusion, which suggests that we have only to stand in the way of event, be drenched by it, so to speak, and the whole process of spiritual growth will be achieved for us, has been briefly and vividly laid bare by Mr. T. S. Eliot, whose *Family Reunion* is a full and penetrating analysis of the inner nature of real experience:

All that I could hope to make you understand
Is only events: not what has happened.
And people to whom nothing has ever happened
Cannot understand the unimportance of events . . .

You are all people
To whom nothing has happened, at most a continual impact
Of external events.¹

In sharp contrast to this stands the imaginative life, with its power to convert both the eventless desert and the "continual impact of external event" alike to valid experience. It can lead, that is to say, to knowledge of reality, to that awareness of what is significant in experience that can distinguish reality from appearance.

This power is one that we might expect to discover,

¹ T. S. Eliot: *The Family Reunion*, ed. Faber, 1939, p. 28.

directly we began to explore it, from what we already know of the imagination. For the imagination is a creative power; it gives experience that we would otherwise lack, it tells us what otherwise we would not know. It is positive. It does not reject or exclude; it explores facts and events that we might prefer to avoid; it does not turn away from any reality, even that which seems painful. We all know its power in this way; it comes sometimes in flashes, taking us unaware, waking or asleep. That is its ungoverned power. But for the man who guides it, as the poet does, who, while dependent upon the rising of the force for his power, presides over and directs it, exercising in himself the imaginative will, for him its potency is far greater and the wealth it can confer well-nigh incalculable. Through it, he has life and has it more abundantly. The steady exercise of the imagination, of what we call the poetic instinct in every man, releases hitherto unsuspected powers, powers that make a counter-attack upon fear, despondency, hatred and disillusionment by the active practice of delight. The excursions out of the self into the universe of men or things that are not himself are expressions of wonder, adventures of the spirit in search of hitherto unknown delight. In its attempt to identify itself with other kinds of beings—whether things, events or people—the poetic mind, even if it encounters pain (as it almost invariably does) does not accept that condition as final. The exploration will not end in pain or grief, much less in anger, self-pity or resentment. Those are subdued by wonder and transmuted into delight. “Rejoice evermore and in everything give thanks,” said the American Quaker, John Woolman, on his deathbed, and added, says his biographer, a little after, “This is sometimes hard to come at.”¹ It could not be put better. Delight and wonder, the poetic mind, are sometimes hard to come at, and we shall walk with

¹ *The Journal of John Woolman* (Melrose, ed. 1898. Introduction p. xxxii).

them but seldom if we only accompany them when they go "in silver slippers". That delight which is itself an act of worship is no part of a fair-weather religion, but something that takes the initiative in the counter-attack upon evil and inertia. It is the quality by which pain is neither avoided nor rejected, but transmuted.

All this may be traced, as I have suggested, in its operation in our daily lives, in our relations with things, with individuals and with groups or communities. Our relations with things we have already examined to some extent, because the peculiar part played by things in the life of to-day, the debilitating excess of our possessions, facilities and toys, seems to have been a significant factor in that surrender of imaginative life which has led to so grave a deterioration of man's inward power. We have suggested that the first steps to the re-enabling of this faculty may be taken by re-making our relations with things. The man who, like our imaginary Michael Smith, looks at even the mechanical facilities around him not with the dull and dreary eye of chronic boredom, but with intent interest and with delight, who checks himself whenever he takes these things for granted, stops and starts again when he catches himself abusing the quality of things by indifference, has, to that extent, set free an instinct that will purge and clarify his mind. It does not matter much whether the thing in question is a flower on the drawing-room piano or the kitchen table, or a new and well-designed railway carriage, the *thing* has its essence and a being of its own and reverence is due to that being.¹

¹ You may object, of course, that this takes more time than indifference. I admit that it appears to do so; but I believe it to be rather a question of dispersal of leisure, a different allocation, throughout the day, of recreation and refreshment. In any case, let us suppose that he is literally (which I do not believe, for it is not wholly a question of time) only able to look at ten objects in this way and must, perhaps apologetically, leave aside a hundred. The answer is the same as we should give to a man who protested that, if he ate a hearty meal at twelve-thirty he would have no time to eat one at one-thirty. Does he need to?

For many reasons, too, it seems easier to begin with things. They are mute and unprovocative. They do not answer back. They do not, as a rule (or only by implication, and that mildly) tell us what our business is. This virtue they share with flowers, trees and animals. Most of us have felt, in some time of activity and stress, that the only creature about the place that seemed to be minding its own business was the cat.

So we began with things, or objects and our relation to them because they *were* a beginning; because human beings, even in times of relative quiet, make an even more insistent demand upon each other's imaginations, and of a slightly different kind. But the extension of experience in terms of sympathy and understanding can also be reached in the habit of identifying the self with the feelings, the experiences and so the point of view of more and more widely differing kinds of people. Some men seem to be born with greater natural aptitude for this than others; it is for example the basic quality of the born dramatist. At its height, as in Shakespeare's mature period, it means that the poet in any given scene will be found to enter into the minds of all his people, not merely of each speaker in turn, but, it would seem, of all simultaneously. This quality in Shakespeare has sometimes puzzled his commentators and there was a tendency at one time on the part of those who believed in the magic potency of event to explain his vast knowledge of human experience by saying that he himself must have followed all the professions, lived in all the circumstances and surroundings of which he shows so minute a knowledge. The folly of these assumptions is of course demonstrated by considering that, apart from the inherent difficulty of his being himself a murderer, a usurping monarch, a fallen churchman and a Roman emperor, it would have needed a lifetime of some four hundred years to acquire by this laborious route the knowledge that he shows. The swift, profound and mysterious operation of high imaginative

sympathy alone offers a clue to a knowledge equally mysterious.

A more homely, a more familiar instance of the operation of this same quality can be found in the world that lies at our own doorstep, and we can best remind ourselves of this by recalling some simple and common examples. These will be obvious to many of my readers, such elementary steps in the exercise that they will perhaps want to pass over them. (In this case, I suggest that they join us again at about p. 103.) Meanwhile we will try to collect a few homely examples from everyday feelings and reactions. They are not perhaps very creditable to our common nature, but I challenge my readers to say that they are not familiar; we are, many of us, more ambitious, jealous, resentful, self-pitying, more generally anxious to explain away failure or misfortune as the other man's fault than we altogether care to admit.

It is hard for the man who is conscious of a narrow, poverty-ridden childhood behind him to admit that a rich man can enter into the Kingdom of God; the rich man already has so much, not only in present possessions but in the "fair seed-time" of a spirit reared in liberal, noble and kindly habits of life and in the character, position and human relationships which are the present result of all this. Again, it is not easy for the childless man or woman to watch his neighbour's children or grandchildren without a pang of envy and a bitter application of the riddling moral "whosoever hath to him shall be given and whosoever hath not from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have"; marriage and children, though no automatic savers of souls, seem at least to give an opportunity for growth and development in character and wisdom that is hard to achieve in any other state of life. Or, again, the man tied by a small wage and a dependent family to monotonous work, beginning to realise that it has no value as service in the community, is beset with moments of passionate envy for the man who, by reason of better

luck in upbringing, education and social standing, performs work satisfying and liberal for which he receives credit and commendation from his fellow-men.

One man may envy in another man's life some gift or opportunity which results in demonstrable, perhaps conscious, happiness, with the accompanying strength and radiance that often make the difference between growth and decay, success and failure, while, for lack of this strength his own life is bleak and severe, calling for constant effort, causing a constant drain of energy by the suspicion of ill-success. He naturally enough shrinks sometimes from the sight of the other man's good fortune; he finds, perhaps, that he can endure his own life without too much bitterness if he does not let the sharp contrast of the other picture intrude; but he sinks under the comparison. At his worst, he is angry, resentful, hopeless: the scales have been weighted too heavily against him; he seems to have been set, for no demerit of his own, to row all his life against the tide. It is natural to shrink, but while he continues to do so he makes no progress towards understanding. He may in the course of time seem to forget, but it is doubtful whether he will ever forget at heart. The pain and the rancour will probably linger, to add an apparently inexplicable animus to some quite different grudge in the future, to vitiate his understanding, his relations, his private and public judgments.

The cycle goes on unendingly, the have-nots constantly suffering the drag and depression of looking back upon what, in comparison with other men's experience and growth seems to be a waste of years, a long stretch of bleak stultification.

But the man of imagination begins, after a time, to suspect that most men, except a rare few, are "have-nots" in relation to some essential, though perhaps hidden, necessity of life in respect of which another man is wealthy; that the nature of the outward circumstance is not a safe index of the nature or extent of inward

growth; and that the very capacity to notice these differences, to fear them rather as spiritual evils than as physical or material hardships, itself indicates the presence of that seed of imagination by the growth of which the evil may be transmuted.

For, as we have seen, the faculty of imagination has, in its function as a transmuter of life no less than in its function as creator of art, two main characteristics; it is positive, and it works towards delight, that delight which, to the artist and to the man of imaginative life, is a sacrament.

When this happens, we sometimes see a man deliberately check his own shrinking, his flight from this happiness that he cannot bear. It seems as though he turns, looks at it and concentrates, not upon his own suffering, but upon the thing he is contemplating. This may seem at first unbearably painful. But if he goes on, bending his mind more and more upon the essence of the thing itself, upon the delight experienced by the possessor of it, exploring, as he gains confidence, the nature of that delight, he comes in some kind to rejoice simply because it exists. When he does so, it is, of course, with a joy like that we associate with the sight of a tree, a cloud, a field. We do not possess it, but what we experience is something at once freer and more durable; the manifestation of a hidden glory breaking out of the unseen into the seen. Moreover, two things seem to have happened in the course of this endeavour: he *has* now in some degree an experience the lack of which was his chief ground of envy, and the barriers are reduced, since he has momentarily identified himself with the other man. An act of imagination has taken place, curiously similar in process and results to the act of imagination in artistic creation. The way lies open to him now. He has initiated himself in a religious exercise. I do not think that what he has done has been easy. We have Woolman's testimony, and that of our common sense and daily observation, to the contrary.

But it is a plain, clear road. It is, in fact, one of the simple, hard things, which if we fail to achieve, we have nothing to thank but the weakness of our muscles; we cannot lay the blame upon confusion of issue or perturbation of vision.

This is a brief example of the process regarded simply as a means of combating a common form of mental distress. It is capable of far wider application than this; but there are few things that press home so sharply as the temptation to personal envy, malice and resentment in men whose hardships are chiefly those of monotony and starvation of spirit. And it is from among these men, who form an increasingly large proportion of our town populations, an incalculable factor in public affairs, that we are speaking. Another curious result of this exercise is that the distressed area upon which this illumination has played will have become less painful by degrees until at last the poison seems fairly to have been destroyed. The hysteria and the personal protest have gone. We no longer see one man, in the monotony of his life as a clerk, envying another his vivid life as a journalist, or, among the vicissitudes of Fleet Street, envying the stability of the Civil Service; envying domestic happiness in the emptiness of his single life, or a bachelor's freedom from responsibility in the gnawing anxiety of the breadwinner of a family; the stimulus of constantly changing scenes in the dreary routine of life in one village, or the peace and leisure of a cottage and garden in the restless misery of a life made up of a succession of commercial hotels; the liberality of a life of action among the petty pedantries of an Oxford or Cambridge Common Room or the liberality of a scholar's contemplation among the petty irritations of a District Magistrate's Circuit. . . .

We could go on with this list of antitheses almost indefinitely. We notice that each of these unimaginative complaints can be stood on its head and it will then become apparent that only half the situation has been

looked at. Imagination, in addition to enabling the man we were considering to accept, with at least the beginning of delight, the positive side of what had been the object of his envy, has allowed him also to admit the disadvantages of the envied man's position. Not, it need hardly be said, so that he should comfort himself with the thought that after all the other man's grapes have an edge to them, but in order to destroy in himself the temptation to an even more insidious form of comfort, the assumption that it is easy enough for the other to make a better thing of life because he has only winning cards in his hand.

Now as to the less immediate and the wider applications of this process. Clearly it could be applied in the first place to all kinds of men whose lives touch ours and whose minds are becoming real to us. We could enter their experience, not only to remove envy and destroy pain, but to become, in sharing their experience, a part of them as well as the possessor of that much more knowledge of the body of society. This is of course a commonplace. But it is not without significance that the chain which would be begun by one man's attempt to identify himself imaginatively with the milkman, the bus conductor, the charwoman, the office-boy, the head of the firm, the policeman and the out-of-work loafer (to say nothing of his own wife and children), has, as its other extreme, the statesman of whom it was said, "He knew how the whole world lived". To know literally how the whole world lives, difficult at any time, would be nearly impossible to-day; it is a very populous and various world. But no step towards sane judgment in human affairs (and at bottom all affairs, however they masquerade as laws, are the result, direct or indirect, of individual responses and judgments) can be made without the steady endeavour to approach each individual, and the group made up of individuals, as beings as real as oneself. We shall miscalculate their reactions less often if we can estimate their

needs, their prejudices and their demands, and keep steadily before our minds the knowledge that these may be caused by some condition or circumstance that we have imperfectly imagined. This knowledge, which we cannot win in any full degree without imaginative identification, is of primary importance in every sphere of life. Its presence or absence in a statesman or lawgiver will have immediate consequences, beneficent or shattering, in time of crisis, for when the crisis has arisen neither the state of mind nor the wisdom resulting from it can be manufactured over-night to meet it. Its presence or absence in the everyday citizen has slower but more lasting effects, and upon it depend not only the decisions which their rulers can afford to make in crises, but, what is more important, the constitutional, social and educational institutions which will develop in times of stability and growth. It is every citizen's necessary contribution to the sum of the world's thoughts and deeds and as such constitutes the only positive provision against war. If you have not loved your brother whom you have seen, how shall you love anything, God or the next-door nation, whom you have not seen? If we could transmute the envious, the bitter, the unimaginative human heart in its daily relations with the men immediately at hand, it might be that problems of tariffs, markets and colonial possessions would become less bitter also, less intricate. Life, which so often seems to be a matter of separate entities, ill-assimilated knowledge and incalculable laws, would be integrated by relating each to each through their relationship with something which is the common centre of them all. And if that common centre is to be found by each individual, it must be in the imaginative life and by exercise of the imaginative power. Our practical example has already suggested by what means this may be done, for we have seen it beginning to quench anger and resentment on the one hand and personal ambition, the desire of possession on the other. Resentment

and desire of possession when they arise between classes and nations are the acknowledged causes of war; but their fastness is in the individual mind, and they are the contribution made there daily and hourly to those causes. Now, the poetic imagination does not possess; it makes no aggression. Moreover, it is there to some degree in every man, even though custom and convention repress, maim and hinder it. So that a nation composed of individuals who could lift up that imagination again, develop and exercise it, would be a nation or state that had been led into wisdom.¹

But at the same time as it gives him this wider positive sympathy with other men, the disciplined exercise of the imagination frees a man from many things upon which he had been dependent, giving him a more detached, a more comprehensive judgment. It dissolves the hold of certain desires, habits and needs, making *them* unreal, in spite of their widely assumed potency. If a man is free, or partly free, from the instigation of anger or of ambition, he is to that extent independent of the rewards of aggression. If he does not want very much of material wealth, position, authority, he will not greatly mind losing them and so will be relieved of a large source of potential fear. Or, to put the positive side instead of the negative, he will want something else so much more that he will not mind very much about these things nor will he fear that his life will become a chilly, draughty, empty thing if they should go. We do not, after all, expect to find a great painter or composer complaining that he cannot go to the cinema twice a week or attend flattering social functions; his delight and absorption in his work will silence those impulses; will, in fact, dismiss them for him without his

¹ These things cannot be done in a night. The process by which the living imagination expresses itself through the ballot-box or local and Parliamentary government is slow. But the steady allegiance of a large body of individuals in a democracy to a living idea modifies first the conduct of a government and then the quality of the men themselves who constitute it, for they must to some extent come from that body of individuals.

giving one thought to the matter. Just so, I think, the natural poet, the man in whom the living imagination works, will find the exercise of that imagination upon whatever comes in its way a more absorbing experience than the possession of motor-cars, visits to fashionable hotels, the membership of an expensive club. He will be freed from the desire for the money and position upon which these things depend. And that is a great freedom.

We have just suggested that the power to disregard these things has its roots in an overmastering desire of a different kind. But what, in more positive terms, is this "something else" which comes to him through the living imagination and ousts these other desires and habits? For here we seem to touch something at once fundamental and specific in his experience. I think it may perhaps be described as the continuous discovery and possession of a different country of the mind, a country that may be entered by any man and by entering which he will himself be able to make all things new. Money, education, surroundings, even health itself, are not absolute determinants of the right of entry; that right exists only in the innermost parts of the mind, and these things can neither ensure nor prevent it. It is, to use a different metaphor, a way of looking at things, and, that being so, it does not matter too much what the things are that are looked at. A rich man may derive very little real delight from the view from his castle in Scotland; a poor Parisian workman may derive a great deal more from the trees in the boulevard as he goes to work early of a fine summer morning.¹ We may perhaps call this way of looking at things the habit of looking at their spirit, their essence, or, if we prefer to put it that way, their reality. It depends to a

¹ I am not suggesting that no landowner is moved by the beauty of his own landscape or that all poor workmen live in a spirit of childlike thankfulness. This would be sentimental nonsense. I am merely saying that the categories created by circumstance cut clear across those created by the presence or absence of the living imagination.

large extent upon crossing a significant borderline in certain of our assumptions, a borderline which all great poets will be found to have crossed (and all poets at all, as often as they are functioning *as* poets). It is the difference between assuming beauty, truth, goodness to be accidental and assuming them to be fundamental. Between assuming, that is, that they are thrown up as the by-products of certain indifferent or even hostile processes that govern the universe, and seeing them as the breaking through of an underlying reality of which they are the intermittent and varying manifestation. It is the difference between believing that "beauty passes" and believing that it, like truth and goodness, is an image or incarnation, in terms of the fugitive, of what is real and eternal. It is the difference between an implicit Satanism and a religion that knows the universe to be ordered and that order to be beneficent; if you like, the difference between Hell and Heaven. This I believe to be every poet's faith, whether consciously or unconsciously held, for, as a great Irishman has said, "All true poetry was written on the Mount of Transfiguration", and all poetic experience is some such revelation of the relations between what endures and what appears to perish, so that even these images, which do not themselves endure, are seen to figure "portions of eternity too great for the eye of man".

This reinterpretation offers us a distinction between that state of distraction we began by exploring, a state of which the visible evidences are contradictory and meaningless, with the individual as their helpless and bewildered prey, and a state in which a world of order, apprehended by the living imagination, breaks from time to time "out of the unseen into the seen, out of the hidden into the manifest". No man, being asked squarely in which world he would rather live—that which we described at the beginning of this essay and that which we are now suggesting—would hesitate in his answer. Nor would any sane

man hesitate to pay the price of entry, that of the disciplined exercise of the living imagination, which transforms him as a man from a distracted bundle of random responses into an individual, and guides him as a citizen from helpless bewilderment to stable and resolute wisdom.

We have come to the conclusion that the quality that can redeem the world to-day is that of the poet. We believe that even in a mechanised society, suffocated in the material accessories of its life, the mood of the poet can still prevail. Indeed, it would seem to be the only attitude that has much chance of mastering that immediate environment that at present threatens to master man. We believe that it will achieve this mastery when the mind of man again takes the initiative in interpreting what he sees and ceases to submit to random impressions and false or confused assumptions; that this initiative is difficult and sometimes painful, needing great faith, but that, when achieved, it gradually converts the minds of individuals and of nations so that rootless and bewildered peoples become purposed and responsible societies. We have called this the poetic attitude, though it is in essence that of all artists, whether poets, musicians or painters; an attitude which is both receptive and active, which apprehends in wonder and proclaims in glory, which no tyranny can subdue, which no suffering can quench, which declares, in its last conscious effort towards the object of its faith, "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." And this quality of poetic vision, found at its height in the great artists and in the great saints, the leaders of man's progress who gave it expression and definition, is innate in all men. The greater part of mankind is relatively inarticulate and stops short of direct expression; for them the artist's expression is made and they recognise in one or other of its forms, according to their individual bents, the witness of the things they too inwardly hope for. Plato would have turned out the poets from that strange, totalitarian republic of his, and no wonder. For

they are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world",¹ holding their commission from beyond it and concerned with a kingdom that is not of it. We have considered some of the effects of this quality as it may be found, often submerged and disavowed, in all of us, and we have attempted to trace part of what may result in everyday life from its constant exercise.

But it may perhaps seem to some readers that we have made an arbitrary choice in thus declaring the poetic attitude the most direct way to a practical solution of the chaos of modern life. We may have convinced them that it leads in that direction, but not that it leads more directly than certain other habits of thought which they have been accustomed to credit. They may fairly ask us, then, to show its relation to certain other interpretations both prevalent and popular. Can we in part meet this by tracing it itself back in turn towards its own origins, relating it to some other area of experience to which it is akin?

We have constantly used, in speaking of it, the terms "wonder", "delight", and "experience"; its approach to the experience it seeks is made with wonder, an essential element in its desire and its achievement is delight. And these are inseparable from its final interpretation, though they may not always appear in the most obviously recognisable form. It has faith in wonder and in delight because it has, at its roots, faith in the highest values conceivable by man's spirit. Poetry is at bottom an affirmation of faith, and though the faith may be so nearly overpowered that the affirmation is only a cry of pain or of despair, that cry is itself a protest, a refusal to accept finally the apparent denial offered by circumstance or event. "The primal duties shine aloft—like stars";² there is an inward compulsion, even when most deeply disguised or confused, towards faith in eternal values.

Towards what, then, we may ask, is its wonder excited?

¹ Shelley: *A Defence of Poetry*.

² Wordsworth: *Excursion*, IX, 238.

To what ultimate joy does its delight reach out? Of what further union and self-surrender is its experience the image? From what source comes its ineradicable conviction that truth, beauty, goodness are not accidents or chance efflorescences but part of the fundamental nature of things, breaking through from time to time into manifestation? Clearly, the object of this desire, which is so intense that, in the great poets and saints, no suffering and no temptation can subdue or deflect it, is some source of life, some original, apprehended or in part perceived, beyond the reach of its intelligence, transcending its most comprehensive experience and yet known, even through that incomplete experience, to be real.

If this be true, that its purpose is towards some original source of life, it may be questioned whether poetic thought does not share this purpose with many other modes of thought, with other kinds of exploration of which the human spirit is capable, notably those of scientific or of philosophic investigation. Why, even if it be a road to this original source, have we been led to speak of poetry and the poetic instinct as though it were a main or the most direct road for the ordinary man? For, surely scientists and philosophers, as well as thinkers of certain other kinds, also pursue knowledge or understanding as far as possible towards an ultimate truth? They indeed do. But there is a difference between the artist's approach and those of these other kinds of thought; we may perhaps express it by saying that their pursuit does not of itself result in the sense of the presence of an ultimate reality, whereas the poetic approach, almost inevitably does. This conviction of immanence is a motive in the pursuit; the way and the end have much of their nature in common. The poet is schooled to rely upon the experience of his inner life in his conclusions, affirmations and actions; he will, if he has to choose between the two, rely upon this rather than upon "what is actual in experience", or the deductions from that. Step by step, throughout a lifelong

practice, the poet trains himself in the apprehension of what is not seen, of something, that is, which may be revealed by sense perception but is certainly not demonstrated by it, while step by step the scientist (to take one representative of a different type) trains himself in critical evaluation of what is presented directly or indirectly to his observation. His deductions take a different direction, and, in so far as he is concerned strictly with scientific observation, they do not necessarily force upon his notice the existence of any other universe than that of physical actuality, immediate or distant.¹

But this lifelong habit that we have just admitted to be characteristic of the poet, the habit of apprehending the unseen through what is seen, is very near what has often been called the practice of the presence of God. His thirst for some original source of life beyond his present apprehension, draws him to his imaginative exploration of the universe, which he finds instinct with wonder and delight because it is instinct with God. The poetic or imaginative attitude that we have attempted to describe is precisely that by which a man (if we may modify the words of George Fox), will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everything. This is

¹ I am not unaware in saying this, that the mathematical physicist moves in a world of thought which is in itself different from that of the biologist or chemist. But I would suggest that in so far as those objects of his contemplation do bring him intimation of a universe beyond the physical, he receives these not as he is a physicist, but as he is himself a metaphysician. A. N. Whitehead, speaking of "our almost inevitable conception of ourselves as receiving our impressions from an external complex reality beyond ourselves", goes on to say, "It may be that an adequate analysis of every source and every type of experience yields demonstrative proof of such a reality and of its nature. Indeed, it is hardly to be doubted that this is the case. The precise elucidation of this question is the problem of metaphysics. One of the points which I am urging in this address is, that the basis of science does not depend on the assumption of any of the conclusions of metaphysics; but that both science and metaphysics start from the same given groundwork of immediate experience, and in the main proceed in opposite directions in their diverse tasks" (*The Organisation of Thought*, p. 115, ed. 1917). The bases of metaphysics and of poetics, in the same way, do not depend upon the assumption of any of the conclusions of science, but there is, I think, a mutual interdependence, such as I am here suggesting, between the bases of poetry and religion.

not to imply that the poet finds the world easy, comfortable or painless, any more than does the saint. He too, like Fox, sees it sometimes as "an ocean of darkness and death", but, like him again, he sees too that, "an infinite ocean of light and love" flows "over the ocean of darkness". Wordsworth described the poetic life—that of the poet himself and of the common man who lives in the exercise of the imaginative will, in terms very near these:

Life, I repeat, is energy of love
Divine or human, exercised in pain,
In strife, in tribulation.¹

The poet, whose reverence for the individuality of all things is ineradicable, sees in God the creator of all life, and the origin of all being in the mystery of incarnation. "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The poet, himself in a special sense "word made flesh", reveals his profoundest thought in imagery and can seldom, indeed, reveal it without; he, more profoundly than other men and with a more moving exaltation, perceives the universe of nature and of man as a vast and endlessly varying succession of images of the thought of its maker. It is to the exploration and apprehension of this that he reaches out in every effort of the imaginative will and in every act of artistic experience. One of the earliest choices of his mind has been the conscious or unconscious crossing of that borderline of which we spoke a little way back, and once across this border, the inducements to turn back recede as he goes forward. "To know God and enjoy him for ever," is the "joy no man taketh from you."

Moreover, the artistic experience itself is often for him either simultaneous with or an image of religious experience. In both, receptivity and activity alternate, or, since the receptivity of religious and artistic experience is itself a kind of activity, it is better to say that there is a continual interplay between receptivity and initiative.

¹ *Excursion*, V, 1012-14.

Certain phases can be paralleled in the two spheres. Some kind of illumination awakens the attention in each case, and, being accepted, may be followed by a focusing of the mind which then begins to explore what has been offered to it, gradually concentrating its attention, as the nature of the intimation grows clearer, until it enters one of the stages of high, active receptivity, in which it becomes collected, waiting upon the full illumination, excluding all irrelevant feeling and as far as possible all conscious thought. The essential characteristic of this condition is something which is perhaps best described as "silence". In the artist there is an intense sense of increasing immersion in an experience, of waiting upon some culmination. This is closely akin to the nature of worship as described, for example, by William Penn: "The more mental our worship the more adequate to the nature of God; the more silent, the more suitable to the language of a spirit. Words are for others not for ourselves: nor for God who hears not as bodies do; but as spirits should. If we should learn this dialect we must learn of the divine principle in us. As we learn the dictates of that so God hears us."¹ Out of this phase there emerges, in both cases, a profound consciousness of the presence of what is sought; and when surface consciousness returns it brings some kind of conclusion from, or expression of, the experience of that presence.

I have spoken very generally in order to use only the terms which I believe to be descriptive equally of both experiences, but the fact that they can be described in terms to any degree common to both indicates the closeness of the two and I hope makes clearer what I want to suggest, that the poet's characteristic experience as a poet—the act of artistic creation—is very close to that of the act of worship. It is for this reason that, of all forms of mental activity other than religious meditation itself, his brings the mind most readily into a condition in which

¹ *Some Fruits of Solitude*, I 507-9.

immediate religious experience is only a further step. (If, indeed, it has not already been reached.)

Finally, we may define this function of the poetic imagination a little more closely by reminding ourselves of a simple distinction familiar in the history of religion. Rufus Jones, speaking of the mysticism of the fourteenth century, says, "It was always at the mercy of prevailing intellectual currents, which swept it now into the danger of an unmoral, or even immoral pantheism, and now into a *via negativa*, ending in a blind alley of Quietism."¹ These tendencies recur, I think, wherever man begins to experiment for himself in the interpretation of the universe about him.

In the first case, he may incline to think of God as the sum of the vital forces of nature, a World-Soul which is the total of all these separate "souls", elemental forces, animal and vegetable life. He is thus the soul of the flood as of the fire, of the tiger as of the lamb, and the summation may arrive not at personality, but at a neat cancelling out into negation. Such a system is unmoral because each identification points a different way and it may easily become immoral since any behaviour may be condoned from within it.

The opposite extreme is asceticism which declares that God can only be reached by the denial of "all that pertains to the creatures", believing that God cannot be found in them nor through the experience of the senses, but only by destroying their power. In the wilderness and the desert we find God most fruitfully and in order to do this we must reject "all outward delight in human beings, all images external and internal that merely please the natural man."²

But the poetic attitude, consciously or unconsciously aware of the immanence of God, takes the positive element in both of these. Seeing God in all things, it yet sees him

¹ *Studies in Mystical Religion* (1909), p. 298.

² Rufus Jones: *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 279, a summary of John Tauler's fifteenth sermon.

not as the resultant of all their energies, but as transcendent; his "dwelling" may be "the round ocean", but he is not determined by it. And the poet who reverences "Nature and the language of the sense" finds in them not the echo of tumultuous human passions but "the anchor of my purest thoughts . . . and soul of all my moral being." Seeing God as spirit, the poetic attitude yet sees in the visible universe the images of God's thought, a manifestation of unseen spirit, "the garment we see him by". Thus it delights in the universe of nature and of man because in one form or another God is immanent in them, so that to love them as images, not to deny them as snares, is the poet's way to the knowledge of God. Saint Thomas à Kempis said long enough ago, "If thy heart were right, then every creature would be a mirror of life", and writers as widely different as Saint Augustine, Saint Francis, William Penn, William Wordsworth and even the mainly negative mystics Eckhart and Tauler have echoed it before him or since:

"I asked the sea and the deeps, and the living creeping things, and they answered, 'We are not thy God, seek above us.' I asked the moving air; and the whole air with its inhabitants answered, 'Anaximenes was deceived, I am not God.' I asked the heavens, sun, moon, stars, 'Nor (say they) are we the God whom thou seekest.' And I replied unto all the things which encompass the door of my flesh: 'Ye have told me of my God, that ye are not He; tell me something of Him.' And they cried out with a loud voice, 'He made us.' My questioning them, was my thoughts on them: and their form of beauty gave the answer. . . . These things did my inner man know by the ministry of the outer: I, the inner, knew them; I, the mind, through the senses of my body."¹

It is, historically, a long distance from the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine to the late seventeenth century, but the imaginative interpretation, essentially that of the

¹ Saint Augustine: *Confessions*, ed. Everyman, p. 209.

poet, of the relation between the "creatures" and the Creator appears again in similar terms:

"For how could men find the confidence to abuse it while they should see the Great Creator look them in the face in all and every part thereof? Therefore ignorance makes them insensible, and that insensibility hardly misusing this noble creation that has the stamp and voice of a deity everywhere and in everything to the observing. . . . Here is man in his ignorance of himself. He knows not how to estimate his Creator, because he knows not how to value his creation."¹

These are some of the underlying causes (as distinct from the practical effects which we began by examining) which lead us to believe that the poetic approach to life will most surely lead men through chaos "to the founding of the perfect City of God". We have seen reason, in the earlier stages of this essay, to believe that it works in practical life; by its fruits we have known it. Now, believing that the spark of poetic truth is in all men, we see as good reason for associating it with the light "that lighteth every man that cometh into the world". This interpretation of the function of the imaginative will has, in other words, suggested a solution to our problems that would have not only pragmatic but metaphysical sanction.

An assumption becomes apparent at this point that has been implicit for some time. We are making a particular image of God; we are, in fact, seeing him as a poet. This is not, on the face of it, less justifiable than the choosing of any of the other images which have prevailed from time to time; of the lawgiver, the king, the supreme moralist, the principle of absolute truth, the head of an ecclesiastical body and so forth. It has, in fact, its own justification, for the element of poetic vision in every man makes it a natural way of approach, and the poet is concerned with as many aspects of reality as his imagination

¹ William Penn: *Some Fruits o Solitude* I, 13, 14, 21.

can reach, whether imaged in nature or in man, in the furthest abstraction of thought or in the least intellectually conscious of our apprehensions. The assumption, in fact, is only significant as it is part of a far greater one. Whether or not any one of these approaches is wise or unwise, worthy or blasphemous, depends in turn upon whether or not we consider it profitable to approach him through that aspect which we may call personality. Paul clearly warned the Corinthians against giving way to puerile interpretations of metaphysical truth. "In understanding be men." For, to limit the imaginative scope of our conception would be to "offer to the author of all truth the unclean sacrifice of a lie".¹ In this domain, therefore, more than in any other, it is imperative to attempt, through the function of imagination, to reach what lies beyond the range of common experience, and in contemplating the nature of God thinkers have continually attempted to push their thought beyond the concepts derived from personality. Being himself involved in personality—even, it would seem, bounded by it—man has not found this easy. Yet, as the metaphysician knows, only this effort will carry him out towards the utmost limits of his scope, and so, though often clearly aware of the paradox, he continues the attempt. Just so, some poets, conscious of an expanding knowledge of scientific or of metaphysical implications in the world about them, have made heroic efforts to force out their ideas to the utmost limits of imagination, as a corrective to the snug and artificially simple formulas whose continued acceptance may cover only mental indolence. The thought that God is a spirit and that they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth has at times laid upon them a formidable and terrifying task of imaginative exploration. Yet the effort never seems to fail of a rich reward in the profundity and vastness of the conception reached and in vitality and illumination of vision. And these are,

¹ Bacon: *Advancement of Learning*, Book I.

moreover, wholly consistent with a deepened conviction of the inadequacy of all images. The images of the nature of God conceived by Dante, Shakespeare and Wordsworth are sometimes so vast that they appear unsympathetic to the ordinary man. The God of *Il Paradiso* seems sometimes an inscrutable essence without attributes; in Shakespeare the revelation is so deeply implicit that it sometimes seems invisible; in *The Excursion* the links between the spirit of the universe and man seem sometimes to be affirmed rather than revealed. These great poets have all variously perceived "portions of eternity too great for the eye of man",¹ or at least for the vision which man is commonly accustomed to exert. Yet each of them contemplates, with the highest effort of the imaginative will, that aspect most accessible to him, and each acknowledges by implication or affirmation that what he sees is only an aspect. It is a more exalted, a more comprehensive, a more essential interpretation than many of us can grasp, but in each case it is still only an aspect, as we can deduce (even if we cannot comprehend) by the very fact of their divergence. And in each of these there will be found also an acknowledgment, in one form or another, that the contemplation of personality, much more of particular aspects of personality, is a partial interpretation, valid only as far as it goes.

A qualified acceptance, then, of the anthropomorphic attitude, of the approach through the personality of man towards the corresponding aspect of God, is the most actual and the most fruitful for the mass of mankind. We can perhaps clear our thought here by recalling a common experience. If we find ourselves standing near a mountain, we cannot fail to notice that we have only a limited view of its actual surface. We see one face, one aspect, which is certainly only a part, and may not be the most typical part, of the whole massif. We may know from the maps, which record other men's explorations,

¹ Blake: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Proverbs of Hell.*

that the whole would, from some other point of view, make a quite different impression upon us; we are foolish if we do not allow for this fact in trying to realise something of that mountain's nature and form. But, when all is said, unless and until we can move to another position, that aspect is the only one available to us and we are still more foolish if we insist on disregarding it and persuade ourselves that because it is not the whole it is not a part. It still is the mountain and it is the part most accessible to us. Personality still is an aspect of God and as long as we are ourselves incarnate in that image which allows us nothing but personality by which to apprehend, we do ourselves as little service by refusing to accept it as we do if we forget the multitudinous aspects that are out of sight or if we make fanciful and irresponsible pictures of what those other aspects may be. Isaac Newton concludes a noble description of the motions of the heavenly bodies by judging their "Cause to be not blind and fortuitous but very well skilled in mechanics and geometry",¹ which seems the natural and fitting tribute of a mathematician, as original and as frank as is in our own day the metaphysic of Whitehead or of Eddington, drawing upon a wider and more complex scientific and metaphysical consciousness. It is not impossible for us to imagine (indeed certain of our poets have explored this possibility with rare power) that the aspect of God apprehended by nature is somewhat other than that apprehended by man, though lying very near it. It might be possible to imagine other forces or entities whose several apprehensions are yet other again; for "all things that were he made and without him was not anything made that was made." But it will still remain true, for the purposes of practical religious experience, that certain powers and qualities in man's own spirit and the experience he derives from them are the surest indications he has concerning the nature of God.

¹ Letter to Dr. Bentley. Dec. 1692.

The two processes must, in fact, go on simultaneously; the acceptance of the limits of his own experience on the one hand and, on the other, the continual reference out from that to the wider, incalculable, but not less real existence which is beyond our actual and even beyond our imaginative experience. And the poet's approach—whether that of the poetic artist or of the potential poet in every man—is as little likely as any to surrender either the immediacy of the one or the magnitude of the other. The double process is clearly revealed in some poems, such as, for example, Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, where the poet ranges from an almost naïve acceptance of the anthropomorphic interpretation of spiritual reality to an heroic admission that the spirit is a thing unknowable through any but that faculty which is itself a part of it. The issue is sharpened in this particular poem by the fact that the spirit to which the poet is seeking an approach is less often that of God himself than of another man. Confronted by the unbearable mystery of the separation by death of two minds akin and intimately associated, the one remaining still incarnate while the other progressed through a world of discarnate spiritual life, Tennyson, like Blake, though with less power and confidence, strove to maintain the relationship. And in the poem in which he records this endeavour, he does something very like what most men do in their effort to make their apprehension of God as complete as the limitation of their individual powers allow: he accepts the image of personality, assured that in it alone can he find the essential reality, but to make this fuller and more profound, he forces himself out as often as possible from its security into imaginative explorations towards what is actually beyond his apprehension. From these again he returns to the basis of his own experience, which correspondingly grows in strength and in definition.

In the first position he affirms again and again the essential union between man and discarnate spirit,

realising how sharply death distinguishes what is essential from what is accidental here, the eternal from the temporal:

Which weep the comrade of my choice,
An awful thought, a life removed,
The human-hearted man I loved,
A Spirit, not a breathing voice. (XIII)

Yet turn thee to the doubtful shore,
Where thy first form was made a man;
I loved thee, Spirit, and love, nor can
The soul of Shakespeare love thee more. (LXI)

In the second position, again and again, he attempts to imagine some part of the experience of that spirit; to reach towards it rather than to ask that their union should be affirmed only in terms of that experience to which he, as a man, is limited:

I shall not see thee. Dare I say
No spirit ever brake the band
That stays him from the native land
Where first he walked when claspt in clay?

No visual shade of some one lost,
But he, the spirit himself, may come
Where all the nerve of sense is numb;
Spirit to spirit, Ghost to Ghost.

O, therefore from thy sightless range
With gods in un conjectured bliss,
O, from the distance of the abyss
Of tenfold-complicated change,

Descend, and touch, and enter; hear
The wish too strong for words to name;
That in this blindness of the frame
My Ghost may feel that thine is near. (XCIII)

How pure at heart and sound in head,
With what divine affections bold
Should be the man whose thought would hold
An hour's communion with the dead. (XCIV)

This imaginative exploration, although it seems at first only to reveal the vast abyss of separation, the helpless

obscurity of the human mind, yet serves in the end to confirm the essential kinship, by defining and rejecting what is perishable in temporal experience; what is unseen then emerges as eternal:

That each, who seems a separate whole,
Should move his rounds, and fusing all
The skirts of self again, should fall
Remerging in the general Soul,

Is faith as vague as all unsweet:
Eternal form shall still divide
The eternal soul from all beside;
And I shall know him when we meet. (XLVIII)

Far off thou art, but ever nigh;
I have thee still, and I rejoice;
I prosper, circled with thy voice;
I shall not lose thee tho' I die. (CXXX)

We have perhaps agreed, then, that there is some value for everyday men in seeing God as a poet, and we have seen that this position is itself derived from one more fundamental, yet also innate in poetic thought, that of accepting the qualified anthropomorphic approach. Upon this too we have perhaps agreed. But both these are dependent upon another still more fundamental and will have no value unless we also accept it, the primary issue of whether religious experience has any validity at all.¹ We have so far approached each of these questions in inverse order of magnitude, because we have followed the road of common experience which does, I think, in general make its way from the immediate to the ultimate. Now we have reached the ultimate, the attempt to apply the poet's faith to the common citizen's attitude to tube trains and wireless-sets having led us, imperceptibly, but it would seem inevitably, to this point. If we do not agree generally upon this final position, the validity of

¹ On the whole of this question and its theological implications, see the first volume in this series, *The Mind of the Maker*, by Dorothy L. Sayers.

religious experience, then the discoveries we have made up to now either become meaningless or must be explained by reference to some totally different law or principle, which I for one do not feel capable of imagining. Our observations of the practical effects of the imaginative attitude could not, if we have recorded them accurately, be dismissed, in any case. But they, and the motive power of the poetic attitude itself, will have to be thought of as contingent upon some other desire than the one to which we have traced them.

I am not going to attempt this hypothetical reconstruction of the basic impulses of the poetic spirit because I do not believe it would have any relation to reality when traced. But the fact that I do not believe such an interpretation to be valuable does not of itself prove that any other that we choose is necessarily true—not even the one that we have just described. To determine this matter would involve a further question that belongs properly to the domain of metaphysics; this is not the place for it and I am not qualified to discuss it; but we might suggest instead, as we have done at each stage of our discussion so far, a few lines of thought that bear upon the issue as poetic faith discerns it.

Most of us meet very often still the tendency to deny the value of religion and poetry on the ground that they are not concerned with "reality". This is stated more or less confusedly by many people who have not examined the grounds for it very thoroughly, and is based on a mistaken assumption about the nature of evidence. But it is still so widespread in popular thought that it is perhaps worth while to touch on it here. It is closely akin to the position often taken at the end of the last century when the apparent conflict between religious and scientific truth led to a long and far-reaching controversy. It is of course unnecessary to point out, in the age of Whitehead, Eddington and Jeans, that contemporary leaders of scientific thought no longer take this position and that

many of them are men of profound religious conviction and eminent metaphysicians.¹ But among the majority of men who are not necessarily interested in the reconciliation implicit in their thought there remains a rooted tendency to reject the validity of religion and poetry (including, of course, the other arts) because, as the speakers feel, they are out of touch with "reality". This may not even be due mainly to the claims made by the popular science of the early twentieth century. The confusion of values and the uncertainty as to what is "real" or of fundamental value arises just as much from the false sense of security and finality given by mechanised living, in which the surface of life becomes all-engrossing and all-satisfying, so that there is neither time nor inclination for questions. What the speaker, in this case, means by "reality" is (apparently) the body of objective fact presented by the material universe, so far as he knows it. This body of fact is sometimes, as we know, treated statistically by economists and certain scientists concerned primarily with the concrete or applied sciences; and so, by those who want to generalise a little more widely, economics and science are somewhat unfairly assumed to be the responsible interpreters of the nature of things, and to offer the only explanations of our surroundings which square with familiar facts and can group them into systematic relations. This assumption still endows the economic or the scientific classification of phenomena and their exponents with a great influence over the minds of many men who know very little beyond the elements of either and unconsciously do a grave injustice to the leaders of both these domains of thought. (There must, it is true, have been something comforting about the certainty of the pronouncements made until

¹ There would, similarly, have been no need to point it out in the age of Francis Bacon or of Isaac Newton. The apparent cleavage between religion and science which set in in the seventeenth century and affected thought on both sides during the whole of the eighteenth century and most of the nineteenth, has been closed again in our own day, mainly by the thought of these very men.

recently by both groups of authorities, though there is a growing realisation that not much comfort has been forthcoming from the economists for the last decade.)

All these rather confused assumptions, which have become deeply habitual and almost unconscious in many men, have gradually combined into a widespread superstition that these systems are complete interpretations of reality and that any idea which does not produce evidence of its reality in terms of one or both is a delusion. Even those whose range of speculation allowed of a little more abstraction would, I think, commonly hold that "science", in which they would include, of course, the concrete and applied physical sciences, mathematics, physics, psychology and economics, had somehow explained the universe, or, at the least, was on the verge of explaining it. Religion and art thus cease to be primary categories of experience and are explained, or explained away, as the expression of certain mental states, subjective in origin. I do not say that this attitude is universal, but it is widespread, and commoner among men who know a little about these branches of thought than among men who know them. Its main interest for us here, is that mechanised civilisation has encouraged its growth to a degree that appears to be unprecedented in the records of any other age, that it assumes that anything that does not offer evidence interpretable in terms of one of these branches of "science" does not exist, and that, by implication and sometimes explicitly, it regards the power that has throughout history been thought of as God as a subjective and not an objective reality. It makes "reality" co-terminous with the material universe and excludes the possibility of any truth not definable in one or other of these sets of terms.

I cannot help feeling that the people who hold this view—or, shall we say, are held by it, for it seems to have attached itself to them without any visible effort of their own?—might have pondered the remark made by the

child of a friend of mine, when first introduced to the subject of microbes. He asked his father whether there had always been microbes, and was assured that there probably had. After a little reflection he remarked: "Isn't it wonderful, Daddy, to think that all this time we have been here and the microbes have been here and we never knew about them—and they never knew about us?"

Or, if they preferred the opinion of a philosophical scientist as strongly opposed as may be to the anthropomorphic interpretation, they might have consulted Herbert Spencer. But even then they would have found that his Absolute, Infinite and Unknowable First Cause is a necessary inference from the conclusions not only of religious but of scientific thought; throughout his argument (if I have read it aright), the absence of evidence in the physical universe of the existence of a metaphysical universe is never supposed of itself either to prove or to disprove the reality of metaphysical truth. The pure physical scientist, that is, would not presume, from the evidence of the universe he contemplates to *deny* the existence of the other.¹

The great theological systems have their own methods of dealing with this extraordinary infantile paralysis of the intelligence, but the average man who is infected or is in danger of infection is now for the most part out of reach of the theologians. Moreover, he is not as a rule himself theologically minded; this mode of thought is not innate in him as is the poetic mode. But the poet, to whom the plain man is more nearly related than he is to the theologian, makes against this attack the simple defence that the mystic has made from the beginning. His belief in

¹ See *First Principles*, Part I—*The Unknowable*. The whole of Spencer's argument, particularly his dismissal of the anthropomorphic interpretation, offers some of the most interesting contrasts to the poetic perception of immanence that one can readily find. Indeed, the only ground on which one can reject Spencer's overwhelming persuasions is by appeal to that very fact of experience upon other forms of which the various parts of his own argument rest; in other words, by calling in fresh evidence from a wider universe, enveloping that upon the evidence of which the original disputant has relied.

the objective reality of God and in the absolute value of religious and poetic experience rests upon the one thing upon which he bases all his belief, upon the nature of experience itself.

The poet would reply—if indeed he could be induced to reply at all, which is unlikely—that the man who denies the “reality” of art and religion, preferring the evidence of what he calls science, himself uses experience (his own or, more probably, other men’s) as the foundation of his belief in those very scientific facts. He would not know a table or its attributes without experience; he would not know the constitution of human blood without experience (in this case the haematologist’s), of common salt without the experience of the chemist, or of a distant star without that of the astronomer. And however far some of these seem from everyday fact, the basis on which they rest must be this and this only, that some man (or group of men in agreement) had experience of certain qualities, facts or relationships, biological, mathematical or what-not, and testified to that experience, their testimony being accepted by those who had shared the experience or were otherwise in a position to assess it. Deductions and generalisations were then made and a large number of people accepted the original evidence at second-hand from those who were in a position to judge it at first hand.

It will almost certainly be found nowadays that the man who denied the validity of religious and artistic experience will have accepted his belief in somebody else’s scientific experience after it has passed through so many hands as to have lost most of its original vitality. Moreover, he will almost certainly be incapable, or capable only to a limited degree, of sharing the experience of most of our original scientific investigators, not only for lack of opportunity, but for lack of the necessary skill.¹ In

¹ Most of us are in this position, for example, in regard to the recent investigations of contemporary physicists and physical chemists.

this case, however, he accepts their testimony and the conclusions from it without the slightest misgiving. The fact that he has not had the experience himself never inclines him to doubt its genuineness; that other men have had it is, for him, enough to testify to the reality of the thing experienced. This is of course eminently sensible as far as it goes. A totally unmusical man taken to a performance of Brahms' First Symphony would probably spend but a dismal three-quarters of an hour. Even so, I do not think he would dare to come out of the Queen's Hall protesting that, because it had meant nothing to him, it had meant nothing to any one else and that there was "no such thing" as music.

But the man whose mind is choked by mechanisation and ill-apprehended popular science categorically denies the reality of religious experience and the objective existence of God on the ground that he has not (or thinks he has not) experienced the one or seen evidence of the other. And, in so doing, he repudiates the two things of which he has most need, the liberating power of the poetic mood and the final resolution of religious experience to which it can lead. No one would suggest that he should try to substitute the experience of others for his own, much less that he should attempt to rear speculations on the findings of others which he had taken for granted (though we detected him in this very process in regard to scientific thought a page or two ago); to do this would be rather as though our unmusical friend were to come out of the Queen's Hall volubly comparing Brahms and Beethoven. But we might, I think, require of both of them that "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment" that sometimes constitutes not only poetic but scientific faith.

If they had been of the constitution of Herbert Spencer they would have done this of their own accord from an innate dislike of the undistributed middle involved in their inference. If they had been more like my friend's

small boy they would have perceived, with true scientific imagination, that two or more universes may long co-exist without absolute proof of the existence of either manifesting itself in unmistakeable terms in the other.

The conclusion which we have suggested is, of course, a commonplace of philosophic science, and in its more abstract forms it will be familiar to my readers; but when we touch the practical problems of the conduct or function of the imagination in everyday life it is a disturbingly common experience to find this commonplace ignored and men habitually denying the value of that function, the reality of that experience. And our liability to be subdued by this habit will, I think, be directly related to the degrees of indifference and imaginative inertia into which we lapse in our relations with the material parts of our immediate environment. The popular denial of religious and artistic reality to-day is not the result of a scientific approach to the universe; it is the direct result of atrophy of imagination in the scientific no less than in the religious and the poetic domain.

The development and exercise of imaginative power, of the poetic mood, is, then, intimately related to the often unconscious but fundamental purpose of the human spirit. If it results, as we have attempted to show that it does, in a growth in individual wisdom and in humane, just and sane relations and judgments, it achieves these things in the course of its pursuit of something beyond them yet without which they would not be achieved. The double process of apprehending part of a truth and acting upon what has been perceived, in the knowledge that that action will itself bring into view further portions which will in turn serve as bases for further action, is common to all kindred forms of growth. But action, the practice indispensable to further perception, can be achieved only in the domain of behaviour and judgment in public and private life, so that the world of such actions (from which we started out upon our exploration) appears to be the

necessary material out of which the immortality of the individual or of the common spirit of man is wrought. This is a relation most readily comprehended by the poet and the man who lives in the imaginative or poetic mood. For he is accustomed to apprehend through imagery and to recognise that the function of the image (whether in poetry or the more abstract forms of symbolism) is to give a partial comprehension of that which it would else be beyond our faculties to discern. This acceptance of the general function of the image leads to a readier understanding of the function of those major kinds of imagery¹—institutions, laws, ideals of conduct, the achievements of art, and of philosophic and scientific thought—in which man has created something relatively concrete to embody his else inexpressible apprehensions of reality. For the poet, then, the whole universe of experience is a succession of images, from the verbal image in which he reveals, in the form of some concrete analogue, the essence of an individual moment of experience, to incarnation itself, which is the profound and original type of the mystery that we touch in every image. Within this universe, where man, nature and much else that we cannot read are, we believe, images of the thought of its creator, there are certain other things which are apparently the images man himself makes for his own thought. It is with these that we have been concerned principally in this essay.

Now the acceptance (conscious or unconscious) of the function of imagery which is natural to the poetic mood, may be of service to us again in evaluating these. A familiar dilemma, especially at the present day, is the difficulty of accepting simultaneously the temporal and the eternal. If (to put it in familiar words—which are themselves imagery) we are to “Look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are unseen”, how can

¹ I use the word “imagery” here because there is indeed an analogy between the word-picture in which the poet images a single abstract thought and those achievements on the grand scale in which the abstract ideals of men, of societies, of nations are given embodiment.

we also say, "Establish Thou the work of our hands!"? If the work of our hands is of real value, then how can eternity belong only to the things that are not seen? Or how can "the ruins of time build mansions in Eternity"? Why should we labour to make a just reform—or, for the matter of that, why should God labour to make a just man—if reality transcends both?

The man of poetic imagination would, I think, see two reasons. First because, even if we regard the world as a "vale of soul-making", it would appear to be a necessary condition that the soul should make itself in working upon some material, as the poet finally wins his vision only in the course of expressing it. Secondly, because as we have admitted, man, being himself an image, can only see by images and not as yet "face to face"; because a practical thing done "in the spirit of eternity" is a remarkably close counterpart of the verbal image of a poet, the fugitive mirroring the eternal. Thus both aspects have their function: the eternal uses the temporal, just as, in the verbal image of the poet, the abstraction, when it is apprehended, uses the visible or concrete to act as its incarnation. This is for the poet the essential nature of the relation between the spirit on the one hand and man, nature, event, poetry—everything that exists in time and form—upon the other. Thus the function of communication becomes, as in artistic experience, the justification of the thing created, the image serving as the means of union between the mind perceiving (whether that of God or that of man) and the mind apprehending. It is this belief which, I think, gives dignity to the "work of our hands" by defining for it a function untouched by mortality or mutability. The image perishes, but not the thing imaged nor the service which the image has rendered it. "Every mortal loss" is still "an immortal gain", and "the ruins of time build mansions in Eternity".

I have tried to suggest briefly in this essay that what we are in need of is not so much an organised reform or a

new system, but rather a re-orientation of our everyday mental habits, a deliberate effort to exercise certain powers to which we have come of late to attach far too little importance. I believe these powers to be very nearly universal in men and to be capable of a radical, even a revolutionary influence upon the relations of men in society and in nations. I am very nearly convinced that the atrophy of religious life, to which many people trace the disasters of recent years, is intimately involved in that sloth of the imagination by which the poetic vision is becoming slowly extinguished in the lives of millions of townsmen. On all sides the cry is raised that it is vision we lack, but we do not all connect that lack of vision with the widespread dullness of soul which, as Wordsworth hinted, results from passing by with indifference the beauty or majesty of the common world of things and men. In this matter of vision we are like Christian, who, when the Evangelist asked him, "Do you see yonder shining light?" could only reply doubtfully, "I think I do." Our best, perhaps our only chance of strengthening it lies not in waiting upon an apocalyptic illumination to transmute or convert us without effort, but in preparing the ground for a healthier spiritual growth. For I suspect that the emergence of the saint or the prophet bears much the same relation to the prevailing desires of everyday men as Matthew Arnold thought the emergence of genius bore to the prevalence of high intelligence in an age or nation. George Fox was born into an age of "seekers", and men get the prophets they deserve no less than the governments. If this be so, then the contribution of the everyday man is clear, though it is not easy; it will perhaps be found to consist mainly in the consistent, strenuous and sometimes painful practice of delight, of wonder and of reverence towards the world of men and things about him. From this all his judgments will take their form and the results of an aggregate of such judgments will assuredly not be poverty, disease, unemployment, the

manufacture of armaments or war. Things that are out of reach of his direct control as an individual are not out of the control of a homogeneous body made up of such individuals. We may say, if we like, that such a state of affairs, such a re-orientation of minds, can never happen because it is not in human nature—because, in other words, it has not happened yet. I suspect that the same criticism was made to the first anthropoid ape that left off swinging on branches and began the experiment of walking on his hind legs. I seem to remember echoes of it, in recorded history, whenever a man set out to climb a hitherto unattempted mountain or to explore a hitherto unopened country. Very little of the immediate future of mankind is, at any given point in his history, certain. But a few things are certain; that he can imagine, that he can apprehend, that he can resolve. To a number of people, too, (and that number is on the increase to-day), it also appears certain that, when we arrive at the solution of any given problem, we find the “known” that resolves the “unknowns” not outside us, upon the circumference of event and appearance, but at the centre, in the power of that imaginative will which looks “not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen”.

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NOTES

NOTE A. (See p. 89)

I apologise for the inadequacy of this description of the artistic process; I have referred to it in order to indicate the relation, which I believe to exist, between artistic and religious experience upon the one hand and the operation of the active imagination in daily life upon the other. For a clear and penetrating analysis of its nature and processes the reader should refer to some modern work upon aesthetics such as Lascelles Abercrombie: *Towards a Theory of Art*. Wordsworth speaks of the relation between the function of poetry and of certain faculties operating in everyday life, when, having described poetry as "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge", he goes on to say of the poet, "He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love . . . nothing differing in kind from other men, but only in degree", and of poetry, again, "Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man" (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (ed. II, 1800), *Poems of Wordsworth*, Oxford ed., pp. 938, 939). The final phase of artistic experience, which is often called communication, has a specifically different form in the two cases. For the artist it means the writing of the poem, or symphony, the painting of the picture, and the transmission of his experience thereby to others who read, hear or see it. In practical life the equivalent phase is presumably some modification of feeling or thought resulting from the experience and issuing in conduct. This is of course strictly parallel with what is generally believed to be the necessary result of complete religious experience. ("What is received in contemplation must be returned in service.")

I have spoken only of poetry, but there are close

parallels in the records of other forms of artistic experience. Mozart, describing the forming of a symphony in his mind, says, that the first ideas come apparently unaccountably. Some of these lay hold of his mind, and then, "All this fires my soul, and, provided I am not disturbed, my subject enlarges itself, becomes methodised and defined, and the whole, though it be long, stands almost complete and finished in my mind, so that I can survey it like a fine picture, or a beautiful statue at a glance. Nor do I hear in my imagination the parts *successively*, but I hear them as it were all at once. What a delight this is I cannot express. All this inventing, this producing, takes place in a pleasing, lively dream. But the actual hearing of the whole together is after all the best. And this is perhaps the best gift I have my Divine Master to thank for." (Holmes' *Life and Correspondence of Mozart* (London 1845), pp. 317-18. Quoted, Rufus Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. xxii, note.)

NOTE B. (See p. 92)

The works of Blake, particularly some of the prose annotations and the *Prophetic Books*, rest upon a system in which the imagination is not only the highest function of the human spirit, but the essential process in spiritual growth. I had arrived at my conviction without remembering (in part without knowing) Blake's system, until a reference brought it before me again. For the benefit of readers who may also be partly unaware of this—an interpretation which, like Shelley's, regards the poetic imagination as the prime light of man's spirit—I will give here a few quotations and references.

"The world of imagination is the world of eternity. It is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the vegetated body. The world of imagination is infinite and eternal, whereas the world of generation or vegetation is finite or temporal. There exist in that eternal

world the eternal realities of everything which we see reflected in this vegetable glass of nature. All things are comprehended in their eternal forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the true vine of eternity, the human imagination." (Rossetti MS, pp. 69-70. See *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by Geoffrey Keynes. Nonsuch ed. 1939, p. 639.)

And in a slightly later passage Blake describes the power of imagination in man: "If the spectator could enter into these images in his imagination, approaching them on the fiery chariot of his contemplative thought, if he could enter into Noah's rainbow, could make a friend and companion of one of these images of wonder, which always entreat him to leave mortal things (as he must know), then would he arise from the grave, then would he meet the Lord in the air, then would he be happy." (Nonsuch ed., p. 644-5.)

In two passages from his letters, the same rooted conviction that imagination is the imperishable, the immortal element in man, is again clear. "I know that our deceased friends are more really with us than when they were apparent to our mortal past. Thirteen years ago I lost a brother, and with his spirit I converse daily and hourly in the spirit, and see him in my remembrance, in the regions of my imagination. I hear his advice, and even now write from his dictate. Forgive me for expressing to you my enthusiasm, which I wish all to partake of, since it is to me a source of immortal joy, even in this world. By it I am the companion of angels. May you continue to be so more and more; and to be more and more persuaded that every mortal loss is an immortal gain. The ruins of Time build mansions in Eternity." (Letter to William Hayley, 1900. Nonsuch ed., p. 838.)

"I have been very near the gates of death, and have returned very weak and an old man, feeble and tottering, but not in spirit and life, not in the real man, the imagination, which lives for ever. In that I am stronger and

stronger, as this foolish body decays." (Letter to George Cumberland, 1827. Nonsuch ed., p. 926.)

W. B. Yeats, in his *Introduction* to his edition of Blake's poems sums up the content of these and kindred passages in Blake's prose and verse: "Nothing is pleasing to God except the glad invention of beautiful and exalted things . . . for 'the human imagination alone' is 'the divine vision and fruition' 'in which man liveth eternally'. . . . He who recognises imagination for his God need trouble no more about the law, for he will do naught to injure his brother, for we love all which enters truly into our imagination, and by imagination must all life become one, for a man liveth not but in his brother's face and by those 'loves and tears of brothers, sisters, sons, fathers and friends, which if a man ceases to behold he ceases to exist'." (*Poems*, ed. W. B. Yeats. The Muses Library, pp. xxxiv-xxxv.)

The same belief in the imagination as the highest faculty of man and in the divine nature of poetry and the poetic attitude appears on nearly every page of Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*.

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